

# MOLONG RAILWAY STATION

## INTERPRETING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS AT ORANGE AND MOLONG

Today, it may seem strange that John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief, approved of a moderate-sized, functional combination building for the city of Orange and did not provide a station similar to that at Bathurst. It must be assumed that the town of Orange was much smaller in the 1870s and that was the reason it received a combination office/residence similar to the ones at Georges Plains and Blayney.

The railway line west of Bathurst to Orange was one of the “cheap” lines that Whitton supervised and he was faced with very tight amounts of money and used during the 1870s combination platform buildings as a means of minimising expenditure. In the 1870s, Whitton experimented greatly with the use and design of buildings. This was reflected in the very unusual design of the gatehouse at Blayney, which was demolished 20 years ago, and the design of the surviving Station Master’s residence at Millthorpe. By the time the line was being constructed beyond Orange towards Dubbo, Whitton had settled on a new design for Station Master’s residences and then proceeded to use that designed from 1880 to 1889. However, he continued to experiment with platform buildings between Orange and Dubbo.

The platform building at Molong was more significant in design and larger in size than the building at Orange. There was one major characteristic of the building at Molong that was perceived to be inferior by the residents of that town and that was the use of timber construction rather than brickwork.

Molong station opened on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1885 – over eight years later than the opening of the station at Orange. During that period, station design policy had received a fundamental rethink and Whitton had by 1885 settled on a new design for platform buildings that he had been applying from 1880, which he applied to Molong station. The period from 1880 to 1885 is often called the “boom years”. This term is used mostly by people who have not undertaken a close examination of the amount of money available for railway expansion, the desire by politicians to introduce cheaper forms of railway construction and the relative small or moderate size of buildings provided. In essence, Whitton had far too much to do for the relative size of the available funds. The decline in capital funding had commenced in 1884 and, in 1885, the New South Wales economy was in deficit.

The use of timber for the building at Molong was not so much an error on the part of Whitton to provide a structure that reflected the perceived status of the town but an indication that money was extremely tight even in the “boom years”. Other significant towns, such as Gundagai, Gerogery, Culcairn and Rylstone also received timber structures the same size as was provided at Molong. It would be wrong to

think that Whitton had made a mistake at all those and other stations where he provided his larger version of what was later called the “standard roadside station”.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to dismiss other evidence that makes the argument about limited funding appear less than watertight. At all the stations where five-room examples existed, except Whitton, the residence for the Station Master was erected in brickwork, thereby encouraging speculation why the residences were built in brickwork but the platform buildings were timber framed and timber clad. Even all gatehouses were in brick for these locations. There also existed instances whereby timber five-room structures were built while, nearby, mini-roadside station buildings were erected in brick, such as Pipers Flat, Ben Bullen, Mount Frome and Lue near Rylstone and Table Top, Ettamogah and Henty near Gerogery and Culcairn. While the Station Master’s house at Molong has been demolished, the brick gatehouse survives to provide a visual contrast of the concurrent use of timber and brick buildings side-by-side.<sup>1</sup>

The apparent confusion about the simultaneous use of brickwork for residences and timber work for platform buildings may be explained by two additional factors. Firstly, it was New South Wales Railway policy at the time to provide brick or stone residences for staff, even in those circumstances where it was intended to provide a timber platform building. In other words, the welfare of the staff was considered to be far more significant than that of the travelling public. The second factor relates to the way tenders were called. The evidence that gives a clue as to the use of timber for these larger platform buildings relates to the cost of structures. Often the Railway Construction Branch would ask the builders for prices for both timber and brick work. It is possible that timber was the cheaper option in the absence of any nearby brick making facility. Local constructions was perhaps most aptly reflected in the unusual selection of sandstone for the platform building at Dubbo.

It remains a mystery why timber construction was used at some stations serving larger towns, as at Molong, while smaller, mini-roadside buildings were constructed of a nearby in brickwork.

## **THE FAMILY OF BUILDINGS TO WHICH MOLONG STATION BELONGS**

The design that was classified by the Railway Department as standard roadside buildings in the late 1890s was introduced in 1880. In the vast majority of cases, the platform buildings were formed not by a single structure but by a suite of two or three buildings, with the main structure being in the centre, as at Molong. The three sizes, with buildings being classified according to the length of the main structure, were:

- the mini-roadside measuring about 35 feet long (as at Borenore),

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<sup>1</sup> The gatehouse at Molong was the last gatehouse to be built at the time of line opening between Sydney and Broken Hill.

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

The five-room, third-class versions were much more standard in appearance than the smaller, three-room type. For example, all five-room examples possessed the following features:

- Porched entry on the road side,
- Centre transverse gables on both sides of the roof on the main building, &
- pavilions at each end of the main structure.

However, there were variations at different times and places. For instance, at Gerogery and Culcairn the roof of the toilet block was hipped rather than gabled and had a ventilator in the apex of the roof.

Below is a complete list of all the five-room examples, which commenced to be approved from 1880. The first-class structures were restricted to the Illawarra line and in the year 1883. They were built in what is usually called the “boom time of railway construction.” The boom time ended in 1886 when capital money became extremely short in supply for the construction of new railway lines, manifested by the provision of all station buildings between Hornsby and Broadmeadow and between Wollongong and Bomaderry in timber, except Kiama. Elsewhere, elaborate buildings on new lines were extremely rare. Of the 30 examples constructed, only one was approved after 1886 – at Cooma in 1887.

The dates shown below are those in which the structures were approved and, if that date is unknown, the date the contractor signed the plans that were associated with the tender documentation. Construction followed usually from one to two years later.

### **BRICK VERSIONS – FIRST CLASS**

<b>STATION</b>	<b>APPROVAL DATE</b>
St Peters	18/12/83
Sydenham	20/1183
Arncliffe	26/7/83
Kogarah	29/10/83
Rockdale	1/12/83
Hurstville	1/12/83
<b>TOTAL =</b>	<b>6</b>

### **BRICK VERSIONS – THIRD CLASS**

Old Junee	29/10/80
Uralla	24/6/81
Narrabri West	20/1/82
Tarago	30/7/83
Bungendore	22/4/84
Jerilderie	1884
Nyngan	19/3/85
Hornsby (4/5 plat)	1886
Wollongong	15/3/86
Cooma	24/11/87
<b>TOTAL =</b>	<b>16</b>

### **TIMBER VERSIONS THIRD CLASS**

Whitton	14/1/80
Culcairn	6/3/80
Gerogery	6/3/80
Kootingal	20/4/81
Nevertire	28/6/82
Rylstone	9/1/84
Molong	2/12/85
Gundagai	1886
<b>TOTAL =</b>	<b>8</b>

### **COMBINED TOTAL = 30**

David Sheedy, a Heritage Architect with considerable knowledge of railway buildings, calls the roadside station design as at Molong *Railway Gothic* because of the following elements:

1. The narrow windows in the general waiting room on each side of the doors,
2. The style of the bargeboards,
3. The design of the trusses at the end gables,
4. The use of finials, &

5. The medium pitch of the roofs.

Other architects call the design family *Carpenter's Gothic*, because of its very basic and minimal Gothic Revival features. The only strong feature the design family has in common with the Gothic Revival style is the use of gabled roofs.

## DESIGN FEATURES

The building at Molong was a timber roadside building of five rooms for the centre, main structure plus pavilions at each end. It measured 80 feet by 14 feet internal with the general waiting room slightly proud of both the front and rear walls. There was a distance of 25 feet between the main, centre section and each pavilion, which were 15 feet long and 14 feet wide internal. There was a porched entry with transverse gables on each side. The contractor was Alex Scouller, a Sydney contractor who built a large number of station and other buildings all over the railway system. Other design features of the structure were:

- overall building symmetry with a composition of three structures set equally distant from each other,
- use of a large forecourt in front of the station to enable visual encapture of all three structures together,
- gabled roofs with a centre transverse gable over the pedestrian entry point and the use of transverse gables for both pavilions,
- symmetrical floor plan based on the pedestrian entry point and general waiting room in the centre of the structure,
- roofs covered by galvanised, corrugated iron sheets,
- apart from the centre general waiting room (which measured 20 feet long by 17 feet wide), all other rooms were of the same size – 15 feet long by 14 feet wide internal,
- 15 feet ceiling height,
- absence of doors on the road side, apart from the porched entry,
- use of sidelights to all doors on the platform side,
- standard arrangement of rooms, being Porters' room, ticket office, general waiting room, parcels office and ladies' room,
- the pavilion at the Dubbo end contained the toilets and the pavilion at the Sydney end was initially the lamp room,
- earth closets were used for the toilet, with waste dropping into an incorrectly named "dry pit",
- standard location of ladies' room at one end of building to facilitate access to the female toilet through a "passage" into the semi-detached toilet block,
- allocation of a hand wash basin only in the female toilet,

- full-length verandahs on each side of the centre building supported by timber columns with decorative cast iron brackets above the capitals,
- decorative curtain boarding for the spandrels of each awning end,
- decorative timber finials on all gables,
- heating to all rooms, except the toilet block,
- face brick chimneys with decorative banding and fireplaces in the centre of walls,
- underground fresh water tank with rainwater collected from the roof of the main building,

The site for the station provided an opportunity to place the platform building at the end of Bank Street, which would have provided a strong, visual terminus for residents walking along the main street of the town. However, this was not to be the use and the station buildings were slightly offset towards Sydney, thereby ruining a perfectly good marketing opportunity. Probably, the location of the Euchareena Road level crossing prevented the use of the preferred location. Nevertheless, the station was very conveniently located to serve both freight and coaching business.

There is a note on the Molong plan that the building was to be constructed to the reverse of the plan. The land on which the building was located lacked a firmness and the structure was built on a very comprehensive system of vertical timber piles extending approximately ten feet below the ground surface.

The platform was 330 feet long and 12 feet wide, extending to 15 feet wide in front of the suite of the platform buildings. The platform was raised two feet nine inches above the rail head, this being the standard height. The platform wall was proposed on the plan to be timber but brickwork was used. It slopes towards the toe, in accordance with the design policy of Whitton. Ramps 15 feet long were provided at both ends of the platform, again a standard Whitton feature. The rear of the platform was protected with three-rail horizontal timber fencing, with cart gates located at each end of the suite of structures where the platform widened. There was a dock platform at the Sydney end of the station.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

Tenders closed for the construction of the railway between Orange and Molong on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1884.<sup>2</sup>

Construction of the station buildings and gatehouses formed a separate set of contracts. Work on the construction of the railway line from Orange was going well in August, 1885, but the local community was agitated that no attempt was being made to call tenders for the erection of the station buildings.<sup>3</sup> In mid-September, trains were running the whole distance between Orange and the outskirts of Molong

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<sup>2</sup> *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 14th December, 1883, Issue 528, p. 6811.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening News*, 27th August, 1885, p. 6.

and Francis Wright, the Minister for Public Works, announced that tenders would be called shortly for the station buildings.<sup>4</sup>

The New South Wales Railways had trouble in attracting suitable quotations. Initially, tenders closed on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1885, for the station buildings at Molong.<sup>5</sup> No tenders were received.<sup>6</sup> Then came the disappointing news for the residents. The people of Molong learnt that “the Government contemplates the erection of a wooden building for a station-house. Should such be the case, it will present a sad contrast to the neat and beautiful brick and stone structures which our township can so proudly boast of.”<sup>7</sup>

Tenders were called for a second time closing on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 1885.<sup>8</sup> Tenders were also called twice for all station buildings and gatehouses between Orange and Molong.

It did not worry the New South Wales Government that the station buildings would be incomplete by the time of the line opening and said that the arrangements at Molong would be sufficiently advanced to deal with the forthcoming wool season.<sup>9</sup> That statement was overly optimistic as a cart weighbridge had not been provided either at Molong or Borenore by the end of 1885. It took until September, 1886, for the Minister for Public Works, William Lyne, to make a promise to have these installed ready for the 1886 wool season.<sup>10</sup> It seems that there was no great fuss about the lack of construction in relation to the platform buildings.

It was announced in the last week of November, 1885, that Alex Scouller from Sydney was the successful contractor for the erection of the station buildings at Molong.<sup>11</sup> On the same day, he was also successful for similar buildings at Clifton and Bulli.

At the time of the station opening in mid-December, 1885, work on the station building had commenced but was reported as being “not yet far advanced.”<sup>12</sup> At the end of March, 1886, the press reported that the station building was “nearly completed”.<sup>13</sup> The station had opened on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1885, three to four months before the buildings were completed. That was not surprising and, more often than not, lines were opened with incomplete station buildings and other infrastructure.

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<sup>4</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17th September, 1885, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 25th September, 1885, Issue 430, p. 6254.

<sup>6</sup> *Evening News*, 7th October, 1885, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 27th October, 1885, Issue 503, p. 6976.

<sup>9</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 September, 1885, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3rd September, 1886, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 21st November, 1885, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> *Bathurst Free Press*, 16th December, 1885, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Evening News*, 26 March, 1886, p. 5.

## REFRESHMENT ROOM – ‘THE BEST ROOM ON THE NSW RAILWAY SYSTEM’

The refreshment room at Molong started and developed three stages. The first stage commenced in 1895 and continued to 1907. In this period, business was conducted from a single room in the building.

The opening of the extension from Molong to Parkes and Forbes in December, 1893, gave a great stimulus to public pressure to provide refreshment facilities along the line.

From 1st April, 1895, Mrs Robards was licensed to sell “light refreshments”, which included tea, coffee, sandwiches and fruit, “on the platform”.<sup>14</sup> It is unknown what her facilities looked like but, whatever it was, she provided the finance and constructed some form of counter and shelving. This was 18 months before the refreshment room at Orange opened.

In a letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1897, the Railway Commissioners stated their intention to improve the refreshment accommodation at the Molong refreshment room.<sup>15</sup> When the local Member of Parliament complained in August about the delay in implementing the improvements, the Acting Premier replied that “the work must take its turn”.<sup>16</sup> The improvements were completed by the end of September, 1897.<sup>17</sup> It would appear that the initial location of the refreshment room was in the former Porters’ room, which was located at the Sydney end of the centre building.

Business was brisk from the time of opening and by 1901 representations were made to the Commissioners for the area to be expanded. The request was denied at that time.<sup>18</sup>

Not only was business brisk but the food and the service were excellent. However, in 1905 there was an ugly incident in which a complainant said that the meals were overcharged. Unfortunately, without having any investigation, the Commissioners initially agreed with the complainant. The following report of the press provides an insight into refreshment room operations and the way the Railway Department handled the complaints. The *Molong Argus* stated:

“Since Mrs. W. S. Robards has been in charge of Molong Railway Refreshment Rooms, the travelling public have been loud in their praise of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Molong Express and Western District Advertiser*, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1895, p. 6. On at least two occasions, the licensee is referred to as Mrs Roberts.

<sup>15</sup> *Molong Argus*, 2nd July, 1897, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12th August, 1897, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Molong Argus*, 24th September, 1897, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th September, 1901, p. 12.



way that good lady has conducted matters, and the elaborate meals provided. Those who are acquainted with Mrs. Robards know that her aim is to give good value for the money paid, and it is questionable if any better or cheaper refreshment room exists on the N.S. W. Railways than that at Molong. This is the verdict of those who patronise the rooms.

Lately, however, some person has made a complaint to the Railway Commissioners that the meals supplied were not up to the standard of that charge, and this elicited the following memo from the Secretary to the Commissioners : — 'With reference to the charge for meals (two shillings) at Molong Railway Refreshment Rooms, I have to inform you that the matter has had the consideration of the Commissioners, who are of opinion that a better meal should be provided for two shillings than at present supplied, otherwise only one shilling will have to be charged.'

After receiving this memorandum, Mrs. Robards wrote to the Commercial Travellers' Association, and the following is a copy of the reply: "Dear Madam, I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 10th instant. Same came before my committee at the last meeting and I am directed to inform you that we have written a letter to the Railway Commissioners refuting the statement contained in the Railway Department's letter, and further stating that, in the opinion of the western travellers, your room is the best on the New South Wales Railways. I trust this will be sufficient for the purpose, and very much regret to bear that you are being troubled in this manner. Henry T. Emmett, Secretary.'

Mr. N. A. Gatenby, of Jemalong Station, Forbes, hearing of the complaint, arranged a petition and in writing to Mrs. Robards says 'Everyone I know is thoroughly satisfied with the way you manage at Molong, and we all look forward to our meals there as being the best served and best conducted of any on the line.' The following is a copy of the petition to the Railway Commissioners: 'We the undersigned travellers by railway from Forbes, via Orange, &c. do hereby wish to certify that we have always found the breakfast and tea-dinner supplied at the Molong Railway Refreshment Room in every way satisfactory, the food being exceptionally well cooked and nicely served. We consider that one shilling per meal would be an unprofitable price and below its value.'

The petition bears the signatures of the Police Magistrate at Forbes, Judge Docker, Mr. Dawson (Crown Prosecutor), Mr. N. A. Gatenby, Messrs. Henley, Levy, Law and Anderson, M's. L. A., besides scores of others, including doctors, solicitors, aldermen, pastoralists and others whose business entails railway travelling. During the visit of the Railway Commissioners on Monday

morning, the matter was again brought under their notice by Alderman Black, who presented all the letters and petition.

A prominent member of the Commissioners' staff also added his eulogy of the splendid way the rooms were conducted, and the excellent meals provided — 'the best refreshment room on the west,' was his verdict. It is hard to understand what could prompt any individual to make a complaint of the kind above referred to when such overwhelming testimony can be given in rebuttal. However, Mrs. Robards need have no fear of such beings while she conducts her rooms on present lines, although it is a pity that a groundless charge should cause such trouble."<sup>19</sup>

The article from the *Molong Argus* provides a sad story of railway administration in New South Wales. From initially agreeing with the complainant, upon investigation by the Railway Commissioners, they change their mind. What else could they do in the light of statements by a Police Magistrate, a Crown Prosecutor, Members of Parliament and leading citizens of the area? Something was fundamentally wrong when a member of the Commissioner's staff spoke not in defence of the Commissioners' decision but in defence of the licensee of the refreshment room.

One month later, one of the local newspapers provided a summary of what had occurred, stating:

"We are glad to note by our Molong exchanges that the Railway Commissioners have decided that they are perfectly satisfied with the manner in which the railway refreshment rooms are conducted at that centre. Some months ago, a report was sent in that the table was not as well kept as the price warranted but, in order to counteract this mis-statement (the room is really the best kept on the line), a kind of 'Round Robin' (letter) was signed by all and sundry who dine there when travelling. The result is as stated and things go on exactly as they have done. Molong has always been known as supplying the best railway meal between here (i.e. Molong) and Sydney, and the refreshment room is certainly a credit to the ladies who run it."<sup>20</sup>

The second stage of the development of the refreshment room commenced in 1908 and continued to 1923. In this period, the refreshment room expanded from one to two rooms. Unspecified works costing £50 were approved in 1908.<sup>21</sup> Four months later, the Secretary for Railways stated that, "owing to the large number of other work matters under consideration, there has been some little delay in dealing with the Molong proposal but that approval had been given for the expenditure of £73 to

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<sup>19</sup> *Molong Argus*, 24th March, 1905, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Molong Express and Western District Advertiser*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1905, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29th July, 1908, p. 13.

undertake the work to enlarge the refreshment room.<sup>22</sup> It would seem at that time the refreshment room was enlarged to taking the adjoining room, this being the ticket office. There must have been a general rearrangement of the internal spaces to allow the refreshment room to expand.

The physical work to enlarge the refreshment room commenced in February, 1909.<sup>23</sup> Mrs Robards continued to be the licensee during 1909.<sup>24</sup> Despite the enlargement, the press reported in 1910 that “the Molong refreshment room was sadly overtaxed every night during the holidays, many travellers being unable to secure a cup of tea owing to the crush.”<sup>25</sup> Of course it must be remembered that the refreshment room at Molong was the only such facility between Orange and Forbes until 1917 when a temporary facility was opened at Parkes.

There was lobbying in 1910 by the Manildra Progress Committee for the refreshment room to be relocated from Molong to Manildra on the basis that the times trains stopped at Molong were inconvenient. In reply, the Railway Commissioners stated that they “had no intention of permitting the Molong refreshment rooms to be removed to Manildra.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1912, Mrs Robards and her family had been operating the Molong refreshment room for over 17 years. She arranged for the transfer of the lease and disposed of the goodwill to Mr. J. T. Neville, of “The Shades”, obviously, a local person.<sup>27</sup> However, by December, 1912, the press reported that Mr. P. Prineap was the proprietor of the Molong refreshment room. An insight was provided as to what goodies were on sale. It said that Prineap was “making extensive preparations for the Christmas trade, and is laying in a varied supply of the most choice fruits, lollies, cordials, etc., for the fruit and confectionery department, while on the other side he has hams (cooked or raw), butcher's small goods, fish, oysters, and all kinds of dainties - these you can take away with you, if you so desire. While as far as Christmas dinner, why you can get as good a one here as at the Hotel Australia”.<sup>28</sup> By December, 1914, proprietors had changed again with Mr Georgio Kallinicos the new licensee.<sup>29</sup> In 1921, Mr Mina Poulos, was listed as the proprietor.<sup>30</sup>

In a three-year period, the Railway Department had a complete rethink about the Molong refreshment room. In 1913, it considered closing the Molong facility and allowing trains longer time at Parkes during which passengers could visit Davies

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<sup>22</sup> *Molong Express and Western District Advertiser*, 19th December, 1908, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Western Champion*, 5th February, 1909, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> *National Advocate*, 27th November, 1908, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Western Champion*, 8th April, 1910, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Molong Argus*, 2nd December, 1910, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *The Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 4th October, 1912, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Molong Argus*, 13th December, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Molong Argus*, 18th December, 1914 p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Molong Argus*, 16th December, 1921, p. 1.

Hotel to have a meal and rejoin the train.<sup>31</sup> The closure did not proceed and, in fact, the reverse occurred in 1916. It was announced in June, 1916, that a number of refreshment rooms would be “taken over” by the Railway Department from 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916.<sup>32</sup> The complete list was:

- Southern line: Junee, Albury and Jerilderie,
- South Coast line: Wollongong,
- Western line: Molong, Wellington and Nyngan, &
- Northern and North-Western lines: Singleton, Armidale, Narrabri and Burren Junction.

In relation to all other refreshment rooms, an extension of the leases was granted for a period of six months.

The third stage of development of the Molong refreshment room commenced in 1923 when it was announced that the Molong Dubbo railway line would be open for traffic “early next year” and, in anticipation of the heavy passenger traffic the Molong refreshment rooms, were to be enlarged.<sup>33</sup> There was additional scuttlebutt saying “the railway authorities might well go a step further and extend the time available for refreshments. This would be a boon that would be appreciated by all who have any experience of the wild scramble for a place at the Molong refreshment rooms when the trains draw in to the station.”<sup>34</sup> By the time the line between Molong and Dubbo was opened in 1925, the refreshment room had reached its maximum size, consuming all the rooms and spaces in that half of the building on the Sydney side of the pedestrian entrance.

Plans were in December, 1924, for the additions to the refreshment room. Prior to that time, the refreshment room had taken over what was formally the Porter’s room and the ticket office. Also, a store room had been located in the former 25 feet long open space between the main building and the former lamp room. The lamp room had been relocated to the Parkes end of the platform, where it remains in 2017. The original lamp room became a “rest house” for the refreshment room staff. The enlargements proposed in 1924 involved the widening of the entire refreshment room from the porched entry to the end of the building. The former store room became a new kitchen at a new store room was added on the road side of the building. It was at that time that the corrugated iron sheeting on the walls of the original open yard were replaced with horizontally set weatherboards to match the remainder of the building. The building then appeared to be one single structure at the Sydney end.

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<sup>31</sup> *Western Champion*, 1st May, 1913, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> *The Bathurst Times*, 19th June, 1916, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Western Champion*, 18th October, 1923, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Western Champion*, 28th May, 1925, p. 4.

With the opening of the line between Molong and Dubbo, the refreshment room at Wellington was closed “temporarily”.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, a new refreshment room was opened at Dubbo. The Commissioners would have loved to keep the Wellington refreshment room closed but strong local political pressure forced the Commissioners to reopen the Wellington room in 1926.

From the time of the opening of the Molong-Dubbo line in 1925, the refreshment room at Molong bubbled on without further alterations for the next 31 years. It was announced in August, 1956, that the Railway Department intended to close the refreshment rooms at Queanbeyan, Yass Junction, Wagga Wagga, Molong, Gloucester, Wellington and Tamworth stations.<sup>36</sup> The refreshment room at Molong closed on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1956.

In 1984, the toilets at Molong station were upgraded and connected to the town sewerage scheme.

## **THE MOLONG SIGNAL BOX AND TRAIN WORKING ON THE MOLONG-DUBBO LINE**

Signalling and Safeworking Historian, Dr Bob Taaffe, advises that the Molong signal box opened in September, 1924, slightly before the signal boxes at Nashdale, Borenore and Gamboola. It was ready for the opening of the section to Yeoval on 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1925. It is constructed of large, flush-jointed, pre-cast concrete slabs.

Graham Harper provided the additional comments:

“When opened on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1924 with the interlocking of the yard and with the junction for the new line to Dubbo included, Molong signal box at the time had the largest [40 levers] frame west of Wallerawang on any line. Later developments at other stations exceeded this record.

It was a fully signalled facility with a scissors crossover at the western end and an extended loop at the eastern end. The scissors crossover allowed flexibility of operation within a short space. Scissors crossovers at junctions were not unheard of at the time, although they were often worked from ground frames rather than directly from the box. Such facilities were provided at Narromine, Dubbo [for Coonamble Line], Stockinbingal and Parkes, to name the first to come to mind.

Molong also had power worked upper quadrant outer home signals with associated automatic upper quadrant distant signals on all three approaches to the station.

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<sup>35</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12th January, 1925, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> *The Canberra Times*, 17th August, 1956, p. 3.

The down outer home at Molong for trains proceeding from Gamboola was deemed to be insufficient protection for a train shunting on the main line at the eastern end siding connections, presumably because of the steep falling grade from Gamboola. An opposing lever was provided to work in conjunction with the releasing lever for the ground frames at this end, and this lever was electrically interlocked with the staff instrument for the Gamboola section. Effectively, to release the siding points at Molong required the Molong and Gamboola signallers both to manipulate the staff instruments to ensure that no staff had been issued for the section before being able to operate the opposing lever and thence the electric release. This constitutes an early electrical linking of staff instrument and lever frame. The use of an opposing lever at Molong was a rare instance, and I am only aware of one other similar installation at Wagga Wagga. There could have been and probably were other instances.

There was certainly a thought at the time of transferring all or most of the traffic to and from Dubbo to the Yeoval route, but the sticking point was Wellington, which was far bigger and more important than the combination of all the towns and villages between Orange and Dubbo via Molong.

Because of the much easier grades between Dubbo and Molong, most up goods traffic came to use that route. The automatic signalling provided would do away with staff transfers endemic to operation of most traffic in one direction. The only steep bit was Molong to Orange, and bank engines could be provided from Orange, only a short distance away. Down goods trains could continue to use the Wellington route, as did the majority of passenger services. There was also a plan to deviate between Molong and Orange, with the new more easily graded line approaching Orange from the north west.

Four signal boxes and loops were permanently closed on the Wellington route around the time of the Yeoval route's opening. These were Cullya, Yukalgo, Warnecliffe and Eulomogo. Each was a down and up main setup, effectively requiring a signaller to be there for every train, so the savings would be immediate. Bob Taaffe says that some of these boxes were opened and closed on a seasonal basis prior to their permanent closure; I am not aware of any details.

I think that Wellington Loco and Refreshment Room facilities were closed around the same time.

Two new loops were opened in 1925 between Orange and Molong – Cargo Road, later Nashdale and Gamboola. Because of the grade, Gamboola was set up as an up and down main loop, with runaway catchpoints in the up loop. Borenore was already a crossing loop, but its interlocking was enhanced in 1925 with the provision of a signal box in readiness for the Molong-Dubbo traffic.

The rest is history. The anticipated boom in copper traffic never eventuated. Automatic signalling on the Molong Dubbo Line was replaced by electric staff in 1933, with a fair portion of the crossing loops having been closed three years earlier. Molong functioned the way it was set up to do with adequate siding space for attaching and watering of engines, and bank engines were used for up Molong–Dubbo line traffic as well as traffic from Parkes.

The Molong-Dubbo line's final decline in importance was when the Gulgong to Sandy Hollow line became available for export wheat traffic which by then had to go to Newcastle or Port Kembla. This route avoided the long winding climb over the Blue Mountains. It's not surprising that the line closed altogether in the years following."<sup>37</sup>

Another version of the story appeared in the Molong press in 1915. Rather than the intention to close the Orange-Dubbo line, the objective was to avoid massive expenditure on regrading the section between Wellington and Mullion Creek. The article stated:

“Owing to the strong representations made by the Chief Railway Commissioner to the effect that, unless the proposed (Molong-Dubbo) line were constructed right through to Dubbo as a first class line suitable for carrying the increasingly heavy traffic of the West, it would be absolutely necessary in the early future to improve the grades on the existing lines between Wellington and Mullion creek at a cost of approximately £400,000, the Minister (Hon. J. H. Cann) decided that the full proposal, viz., from Molong to Dubbo should be prepared and submitted for reference to the Public Works Committee.”<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the reason for and implications of the Molong-Dubbo line, it was clearly built with the intention of it being a high-capacity, main line railway.

Stuart Sharp

26<sup>th</sup> June, 2017

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<sup>37</sup> Email from Graham Harper, dated 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> *Molong Argus*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1915, p. 6.

