

# CUMNOCK AND YEOVAL

## PLATFORM BUILDINGS

Throughout the 1920s, the New South Wales Railway Department used precast concrete unit construction on rural branch line expansion for platform buildings, signal boxes, residences and other structures, though there were exceptions. The entire line between Molong and Dubbo featured concrete unit platform buildings.

For the first time, William Hutchinson, the Chief Engineer, Railway Construction, approved the use of island platforms on single lines at the time of line opening – at Cumnock and Yeoval. Access for pedestrians and goods traffic was made much more difficult and dangerous. In the period between 1910 and 1920, island platforms were popular for the duplication of main lines but rarely used for single lines, either at intermediate or terminal stations at the time of line opening. The reason they were used for intermediate stations was to allow passenger trains in opposing directions to pass each other while both trains simultaneously used the platforms. The use of island platforms was a rare occurrence on the Molong-Dubbo line and, certainly, the convenience for passing passenger trains did not balance the inconvenience to both local passenger and freight/parcels customers. Island platforms were also provided at Larras Lee, Arthurville and Toongi, where conventional Pc2 pre-cast concrete buildings were provided. Walmer and Yullundry were also built as Pc2 buildings but later reduced in 1964.<sup>1</sup>

For Cumnock and Yeoval, Hutchinson approved what Paul Horder, the specialist on concrete railway structures, calls an “Ac<sup>8</sup>” building 74 feet 7 ½ inches internal and 76 feet 5 ½ inches long external x 11 feet internal and 12 feet 6 inches wide external. There was no such classification as Ac<sup>8</sup> but the nomenclature was adopted as the non-standard structures were closest in design to the standard A8 building. The structures were intended to be used on island platforms. This was a rare use of the Ac style building style but, even rarer, was the fact that it was approved when no standard plan existed for an “Ac<sup>8</sup>” building. This was another example where no one in the Railway Department design office bothered to find out what was really going on.

In May, 1922, a station arrangement plan had been prepared for Cumnock that showed an “A8” building, implying that the structure would be constructed of either brickwork or timber. The next year, 1923, that 1922 decision was abandoned and the use of precast concrete units was approved but no one check to see whether, by adding a simple letter “c”, standing for concrete, reflected an existing standard plan of with the “Ac<sup>8</sup>” nomenclature. The concrete unit structure was being built in August,

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<sup>1</sup> Advice from Paul Horder by email, 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2017.

1924, when the local newspaper stated that “the station will be an imposing structure when finished.”<sup>2</sup> There was also a signal box on the platform, which has been demolished.

Paul Horder’s panel by panel comparison of both buildings reveals that the Cumnock and Yeoval structures were built the same, but both were modified in the 1970s and 1980s. Overall, he thinks that everything about the line has the smell of “gold plating”.

Dimensions are available for the Cumnock building. Externally, the building was 72 feet six inches by 12 feet four inches with nine feet wide awnings on each side. The rooms were (in 1982):

- Station Master’s office (16 feet long),
- Out of Room [former parcels office & general waiting room] (19 feet six inches long),
- Waiting room [former ladies’ waiting room] (12 feet six inches long),
- Female toilet (8 feet long),
- Store room [former access to remove night soil pans] (4 feet wide), &
- Male toilet (12 feet long).

There were two concrete water tanks at each end of the building.

Yeoval station had a second concrete unit building on the platform at the Molong end, namely the signal box, which had a 13ft extension at the Sydney for the Train Controller for the Molong-Dubbo line. A photograph of the signal box/Train controller’s office on the platform at the gable is located in the article by Bob Booth, entitled “Signal Survey: Single Line Automatic Signalling (Molong–Dubbo)”, *Roundhouse*, July, 1986, p. 40. There is an internal photograph of the Train Controller’s office on page 457 of the in-house, departmental magazine, *The Staff*, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1925.

The decision to abandon the use of brick or timber for the Cumnock and Yeoval platform buildings was an example of the need for economy. There was another precast concrete unit building at Yeoval that also demonstrated the importance of saving money. The evidence was written on the plan for the third precast concrete unit building, but this time it was located off-platform beside the line. A plan dated 14<sup>th</sup> September, 1923, from the Signal Engineer’s Office was issued and subsequently amended on 4th March, 1924, for a concrete unit battery room measuring 21 feet by 12 feet 6 inches. It had a gabled roof covered with iron without

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<sup>2</sup> *Western Age*, 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1924, p. 2.

platform awnings. A notation was expressed on the plan saying, “concrete floor in battery room and portion of Engine Room not to be put down at present.” Second-hand timber was to be used for internal shelving. In this instance, a small saving was envisaged by not providing a concrete floor in all areas of the structure. The corrugated iron roofing on this structure contrasted with the Fibrolite slates on the platform building at Yeoval and the difference is explained by the different branches which approved the designs of the two buildings on the platform. This practice, once again, demonstrated the absence of standardised building features across the organisation.

A photograph of the exterior of this third off-platform, concrete building is located on page 459 of *The Staff*, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1925.

It would seem that, at the time of line opening, Yeoval with five buildings (1 the main platform building, 2 the signal box/Train Controller’s office, 3 the off-platform, battery/electrical control room, 4 the residence & 5 the toilet at the rear of the residence) possessed the highest number of precast, concrete unit structures of any station on the New South Wales railway system.

The press reported in September that “the Station Master’s house at the (Yeoval) railway station is being built, but the station itself is very slow in being started”.<sup>3</sup> It was reported that “all material for the buildings is on the ground in readiness. They are to be almost entirely of concrete, and even the (rainwater) tanks will be of concrete. There are to be four tanks for the station, each built to contain 600 gallons. There was an expectation that overhead pedestrian bridges would be provided at all stations because of their island configuration but Cumnock was the only location where one was built.”<sup>4</sup>

Cumnock station buildings and residence were built by local private contractors, Messrs. Oliver and Keegan.<sup>5</sup> They also built the footbridge in 1924.<sup>6</sup> The building at Cumnock was described in the press as “a most up-to-date station” with another remark that “the station itself is on an island platform, splendidly built and equipped”.<sup>7</sup> It is possible that the same contractor who built the Cumnock station building also built the facilities at Yeoval but there is no evidence to support that assertion. As the precast concrete units would have been made in the Railway workshops, probably the contractors erected the structures, as opposed to procuring precast concrete units from somewhere else.

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<sup>3</sup> *Wellington Times*, 11th September, 1924, p. 5

<sup>4</sup> *Wellington Times*, 24th July, 1924, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Wellington Times*, 22nd May, 1924, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Molong Express and Western District Advertiser*, 29th November, 1924, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Sydney Mail*, 18th February, 1925, p. 3.

The platform building at Cumnock is now the only platform structure on the former Molong-Dubbo line.

## **THE STATION OPENINGS**

Both stations were opened on the line opening between Molong and Yeoval on 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1925. The line north of Yeoval to Dubbo East Junction was opened on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1925. However, there were press reports that trains were running the whole length of the line between Molong and Dubbo in October, 1924, though at that time the station buildings and ballasting were incomplete.<sup>8</sup>

## **THE OUT-OF SHEDS**

The construction of goods sheds and “out-of sheds” were also built by external contractors under a system of competitive tenders and it is assumed that it was the same contractor which built the platform buildings and residences at Cumnock.<sup>9</sup> Tenders closed on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1923. The goods and out-of sheds had timber frames and were clad externally with corrugated iron sheets.

Out-of sheds were traditionally built on platforms but the Railway Department realized the awkwardness of doing that on island platforms. At Cumnock and Yeoval, the out of sheds were built on goods sidings.

Why did the Department not use its day-labour force for the construction of all the buildings and why were not the out of sheds built of concrete units? These questions represent yet additional, puzzling inconsistencies in station design and construction policy. It can only be assumed that there was either insufficient departmental staff or that use of contractors was being be a cheaper option.

At Cumnock, the deck of the out-of goods shed platform was three feet six inches above the rail head, compared to the standard height for passenger platforms of three feet two inches.

## **SIGNAL BOXES**

Paul Horder advises that signal boxes were provided at Larras Lee, Cumnock, Yeovil, Arthurville and Toongi on the island platforms with 15-inch wide concrete units and gable roofs sheeted with corrugated iron. Yeovil signal box was larger because of the addition of the Train Controller’s office and was eight concrete units long and three units wide. The other signal boxes were five concrete units long by

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<sup>8</sup> *Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent*, 17th October, 1924, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Government Gazette New South Wales*, 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1923, Issue 126, p. 4660.

three units wide. They were the last boxes constructed with the larger, 15-inch wide concrete units.

Paul says that the remains of the signal box at Cumnock has some of the concrete units and posts in place.

Interestingly, smaller, 10-inch wide concrete units were used for all the station buildings, compared to the larger, 15-inch wide units for the signal boxes and other related structures. Also, while the roofs of the signal boxes were covered with galvanised, corrugated iron sheets, the roofs of the main platform buildings were covered with asbestos cement slates set in the diamond position. Why were there inconsistencies between the sizes of concrete units and the roof material? Because the signalling buildings were built by the Signal Engineer's Office and the non-signalling platform buildings were erected by the Existing Lines Branch. In other words, it was another case of bureaucratic power displaying their branch near-autonomy.

## **PLATFORMS**

Upon opening in 1925, both the Cumnock and Yeoval platforms were 250 feet long, with ramps at each end.

Cumnock had rendered platform walls, though the goods loading dock was timber.<sup>10</sup> Cumnock and Yeoval were island platforms 250 feet long. Cumnock may even be concrete poured in situ. The platform walls at Yeoval were timber.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the Yeoval platform was not curved but straight on both sides.

## **RESIDENCES**

Both houses accorded to the influence of the Californian bungalow style, especially noticeable in the selection of a gabled roof at the front elevation and a hipped roof on the rear elevation. The front of the houses was symmetrical.

Both residences were officially coded "Jc2B" and these were amongst a small group of residences where the design was based on climate. The selection of whether a residence was to be closer to the coast line or further inland seems a strange policy division as no matter where the residences were built, pre-cast concrete units were used. Corrugated iron sheets covered the roofs.

Fibrolite sheets with timber cover strips were added to the western side of the Cumnock house in 1934. Paul Horder advises that Fibrolite was also fitted to the

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<sup>10</sup> J. Marriott, *The Crossroads – A History of Cumnock*, no place, Scorpio, 1993, pp. 115, 116 and 121.

<sup>11</sup> *Railway Digest*, November, 1994, p. 30.

eastern side but has been removed. A toilet has been affixed to the rear of Cumnock house but the original concrete unit toilet with a barrel roof is extant at the rear of the property.

Paling fences were provided on the sides and a picket fence at the front. The size of the allotment was 198 feet by 66 feet (i.e. three chains by one chain).

But residences at Cumnock and Yeoval survive.

Stuart Sharp

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