

ERSKINEVILLE RAILWAY STATION

THE FIRST STATION

- The Illawarra line between Redfern and Hurstville was opened on 15th October, 1884 as double track,
- Erskineville railway station was opened on 3rd August, 1885 (but the suburb was named Macdonaldtown) - eight months after the line opening on the Redfern side of Erskineville Road,¹
- Access to the two side platforms was from Burren Street and Railway Parade,
- At the time the station opened, there were small, simple timber waiting rooms on each platform and a ticket office on the Sydney-bound platform,
- In June, 1888, the Macdonaldtown Municipal Council requested a ticket office for the Hurstville-bound platform,
- There were no waiting room accommodation or toilets for women and such was requested in March, 1889,²

THE “NEW” (SECOND?) STATION

- Macdonaldtown Municipal Council requested a new station in December, 1889,³
- The Railway Commissioners advised Macdonaldtown Municipal Council in February, 1890, that plans for the “new station” had been completed,⁴
- There is confusing evidence to say whether the original platforms remained in position in 1890 or whether they were relocated, as there was a comment in the press that the lighting in the adjacent streets was better “before the removal of the station”,⁵
- Tenders closed on 31st March, 1890, for the “erection of a passenger station and bridge at Erskineville on the South Coast Railway”⁶ – this involved the provision of the NSW Railways’ first overhead booking and parcels office – it had a cut-hipped roof - construction of the road bridge over the railway line was part of the contract,
- The 1890 overhead facility was the prototype for a further 67 examples built between 1890 and 1961
- John Forsyth states in his *Station Information Notes* that there was also a waiting room in the overhead building – while this was unusual, it did also occur at Waverton in 1893,

¹ *Evening News*, 3rd August, 1885, p. 5. Was this the only suburb or town served by two railway stations with totally different names?

² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2nd March, 1889, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 24th December, 1889, p. 4.

⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th February, 1890, p. 3.

⁵ *Evening News*, 20th June, 1893, p. 3.

⁶ *New South Wales Government Gazette*, Issue No. 178, 28th March, 1890, p. 2746 and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th April, 1890, p. 10.

- The successful tenderer for the construction of the bridge and adjacent overhead booking office was Gatty and (Richard) Flook – they were general contractors based in Sydney and worked on government and private projects in the city and country – the only works they are recorded as being done for the NSW Railways were between 1888 and 1890 involving the stations at Gosford as well as Erskineville, an office for the Locomotive Branch at Eveleigh and a bridge at “Black Creek” on the Main North line,⁷
- At the same time the overhead booking office was erected, “shelters” were placed along both platforms but this work restricted the available space for passenger movements with a press report that the conditions were “dangerous”,⁸

POST-CONSTRUCTION IMPROVEMENTS AT THE SECOND STATION

- The road bridge and booking office were completed quickly and in June, 1890, there were local protests that the road bridge was too narrow – the Commissioners replied that the widening “must remain in abeyance for the present (due to the economic Depression),⁹
- The Commissioners wrote to Macdonaldtown Council in June, 1892 – two years after a request for the bridge to be widened – stating that the work would be done “as speedily as possible”,¹⁰
- In 1891, the Railway Commissioners agreed to provide improved lighting and better access to the station but, later in the same year, they told Macdonaldtown Council that they “could not justify any further expenditure in improvements at Erskineville station”,¹¹
- Two requests were made by Macdonaldtown Municipal Council in 1893 for improvements to station – the first was the provision of a light in Burren Street and the second was the connection of the station to the local sewerage system because of the existing “unfavourable sanitary arrangements”,
- The Railway Commissioners in 1893 declined to provide improved lighting but did agree to connect the station to the sewerage system,¹²
- The name of the suburb served by the station was changed from Macdonaldtown to Erskineville in 1893,
- The station was repainted in 1894 using a competitive tender system rather than departmental day labour (it was unusual for tenders to be called for work on existing running lines but Chief Commissioner Eddy did this at other locations during his tenure),¹³

⁷ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 18th August, 1888, p. 18 and 12th April, 1890, p. 43 and the *Cumberland Free Press*, 3rd October, 1896, p. 6.

⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2nd September, 1890, p. 6. The nature of the platform buildings is a puzzle at the moment with conflicting evidence.

⁹ *Evening News*, 2nd July, 1890, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15th June, 1892, p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29th January, 1891, p. 6 and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23rd June, 1891, p. 6.

¹² *Evening News*, 5th June, 1893, p. 3, 20th June, 1893, p. 3 and 14th July, 1893, p. 2.

¹³ *New South Wales Government Gazette*, Issue No. 707, 26 October, 1894, p. 6887.

- A tramway was opened from the city to Erskineville station on 25th January, 1909 – while taking a longer journey time than the train, the tram service eliminated the need for passengers to change between train and tram at Sydney station for the remainder of the journey to the City and Circular Quay – the line closed in 1933 due to the quicker journey from 1926 on the adjacent electric train service,¹⁴
- In 1912, the soon to be replaced second or “new” station site was described in the following terms:
 “the present Erskineville railway station is more fitted for a back-country village than for a populous district. It has a woebegone, forgotten appearance, as though it subsisted on one train a day, to witness the arrival of which all the inhabitants mustered on the platform smoking reflective (sic) cigarettes.”¹⁵

THE THIRD (PRESENT) STATION

- The station required relocation as the Sydney-bound platform at the 1890 site was in the location of the future two additional lines and there was insufficient room to place these behind the platform, due to the proximity of Burren Street,
- Site relocation had the big advantage that construction work could take place while the existing station continued to handle the coaching business,
- The four tracks came into use on 15th June, 1913, between Tunnel Box and Sydenham.¹⁶
- Plan for the side platforms and the overhead booking office were prepared in 1911 – Erskineville station is the only location on the NSW rail system to feature two overhead facilities in different locations,
- It is the station with longest period to feature use of an overhead booking office; it is one of 13 extant timber examples and the second oldest timber example,¹⁷
- The features of the overhead booking/parcels office were/are:
 1. Timber construction, except for the gables that feature roughcast concrete,
 2. Rusticated weatherboards on external walls with subsequent patching using non-matching profiles,
 3. Simple rectangular shape measuring 24 feet by 20 feet internal and an entrance lobby 15 feet wide under a simple, gabled roof (all gables without finials),

¹⁴ *Sunday Times*, 24th January, 1909, p. 11 and A. Sharpe, *Pictorial History Newtown*, 1999, Alexandria, Kingsclear Books, p. 83.

¹⁵ *Sun*, 21st March, 1912, p. 2.

¹⁶ Traffic Branch Circular No. 146, dated 10th June, 1913.

¹⁷ Behind Gordon planned in 1910. The other timber examples are at Arncliffe, Tempe, Gordon, Lithgow, Yagoona (with changed roof style), Bankstown (“upgraded”), Punchbowl, Wiley Park, Belmore, Dulwich Hill, Denistone and Clyde,

4. Transverse gable roof over the entry lobby on the Newtown end,
 5. Vertical curtain boarding used on both ends of the transverse gabled roof as a decorative feature,
 6. Multi-coloured Cathedral glass in the nine small panes of the upper window sashes,
 7. Timber “aprons” applied under the windows as decoration in a manner to provide fake moulding,
 8. Roofs covered originally with asbestos-cement “slates” (used between 1907 and 1926) for buildings in Sydney for roofs only of overhead buildings – not platform buildings,
 9. Two ticket windows, &
 10. Absence of any staff facilities.
- The two side platforms and their buildings were built first – by January, 1912, – to allow the demolition of the existing platforms and it was reported that work would proceed shortly on the island platform,¹⁸
 - In March, 1912, retaining walls were in place and the platforms were “almost finished, while carpenters and plumbers are hard at work on the station buildings.” One press article said that there was “evidence of haste throughout the job.” It seems that this was a reference to the fact that the work was occurring at a quick pace rather than suggesting that short cuts were being made. For example, the platforms were described as “long and roomy” and one press article said that “the station has clearly been designed with some view to the needs of the crowded population of the district.”¹⁹
 - The plan for the building on platform Nos 2 and 3 was not issued until July, 1912, almost a year after the plans were prepared for the buildings on platform Nos 1 and 4,
 - No alpha-numeric code was applied to the architectural plan for the buildings, though the location sketch showed “station building A7 without parcels” – this was totally incorrect as the standard A7 building was a completely different design and did not contain a parcels room,
 - The features of the buildings were/are:
 1. Island platform building was 72 feet 10 ½ inch length by 12 feet six inches wide external with side platform structures 15 feet shorter but of the same width,
 2. Designed in the Federation-influenced style in use between 1892 and 1935,
 3. Belongs to the building sub-group with the highest level of standard decoration which was applied between 1910 and 1923,

¹⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th January, 1912, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Sun*, 21st March, 1912, p. 2.

4. Linear floor plan with simple gabled roof with terracotta finials and chimney pots,
5. Symmetry achieved by the use of 11 feet wide awnings that matched the internal building width of 11 feet,
6. Solid brick construction set in the rarer Flemish bond with tuckpointing,
7. Special, bevelled and coloured bricks applied to the top of the plinths around the base of each structure,
8. Extensive decoration evident in moulded string course around external walls, window and door heads, aprons under window sills and corbels supporting the platform awnings,
9. Nine pane, coloured Cathedral glass in upper window sashes,
10. Name of station in lower window sashes (a feature used between 1908 and 1938),
11. Galvanised, corrugated sheet iron on all roofs,
12. Provision of waiting rooms and toilets in all platform buildings with the island platform structure being 15 feet longer to accommodate a room for the Station Master,
13. Open fireplaces in all waiting rooms and Station Master's office,
14. Toilets flushed by reticulated water supply,
15. Hand wash basins supplied only in female toilets (normal, departmental practice), &
16. Unusual extension of the platform awnings for the buildings on platform Nos. 1 and 4 at the Redfern end to provide standing room under cover,

POST-CONSTRUCTION CHANGES AT THE THIRD STATION

- There is a relaying hut below the stepway leading to platform Nos. 2 and 3 formed of rusticated, 10-inch-wide, pre-cast concrete units and probably dates from electrification in 1926,
- The Station Master's office was originally located at the Sydney end of the building on platform Nos. 2 and 3 but in 1949 it was converted into a Porters' Room and the general waiting room in the platform No. 1 building was converted into a new office for the Station Master – another instance of the elimination of public facilities for departmental use,
- The platform walls of the two proposed, additional tracks for sextuplication were provided in the 1950s and are extant,
- The newsagency on the overhead bridge was not part of the 1911 plan and, from the use of Bessemer-style large concrete blocks, dates from the 1960s,
- In the first half of the 1990s, the station received the usual *CityRail* treatment with red and white seats, red rubbish bins and new station nameboards with the station name above a painted line displaying a colour associated with the rail corridor – these have all been replaced by the parade of new blue and white signage denoting the new operator, *Sydney Trains*,

- One initiative by CityRail as part of the station upgrading programme was the replacement of the cyclone fencing at the rear of the side platforms with white “pool” style fencing – one of the casualties was the removal of the original double-gate towards the St. Peters end of platform No. 4 which was used by hearses to deliver coffins for the trains to Woronora Cemetery (a replacement double-gate was installed and marks the location of the original entry)
- Platform No. 1 was completely reconstructed in 2004 with a precast concrete unit platform wall and a concrete deck poured in situ – all the vegetation behind the platform was removed at the same time,
- In February, 2011, a 40-metre long canopy was completed on platform No. 1 towards the Sydney end, &
- The platform buildings were repainted in February, 2015.

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

- This is an extremely rare example of an almost intact example of a 1912 station. The station is listed on the State Rail Authority Section 170 Heritage and Conservation Register.
- The station is not listed on the Sydney City Council Local Environment Plan as a heritage item.

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