FORBES RAILWAY STATION

OPENING

John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief, Railway Construction Branch, Department of Public Works, reported in 1876 to the Railway Commissioner about the extension of the Western line to Forbes and further west to Menindee. He was pretty familiar with the section of line to Molong as he had previously examined that route for a possible extension northward to Wellington. Also, he had a report in 1876 indicating that the preferred route to the west was through Molong rather than a more southerly direction through Eugowra.

Forbes was already an established regional town from the 1860s. Under the Land Act, 1884, Forbes became the headquarters of the Land Board District for the Lachlan Valley west of Eugowra. Connecting the railway with important regional centres had been a policy throughout the 1880s and the objective of the early 1890s was to provide a service to those few towns without a railway connection to Sydney. The Legislative Assembly on 25th June, 1890, passed the "Molong to Parkes and Forbes Railway Act, which received Royal Assent on 26 August, 1890.

Forbes station opened on 18th December, 1893, as terminus of the railway line from Molong. The line was extended south from Forbes to Caragabal on 8th April, 1918.

EVOLUTION OF THE DESIGN – THE INTRODUCTION OF THE FIRST MODIFIED STANDARD ROADSIDE STATION BUILDING DESIGN

John Whitton had introduced what was officially labelled in the early 1890s the "standard roadside station" in 1880. There were three variations within that design family and the last example of any variation was approved in 1888. At that time, John Whitton retired.

Whitton's replacement, James Angus, decided to use Whitton's design for replacement buildings on existing lines, though in a modified form. That was the first time that the Existing Lines Branch had utilised the road side design. Angus approved the use of the design at seven stations, these being:

- 1889 St Leonards
- 1890 Lithgow, Carlton, Adamstown, Campbelltown and Wentworth Falls
- 1891 Fairfield

Also in 1891, an example was used for the terminus at Yass Town but this example was approved by Henry Deane and the plan had been prepared in 1889.

How was the modified form used between 1889 and 1891 different to the standard design used by Whitton between 1880 and 1888? Angus introduced 13 significant design changes. These were:

- Abandonment of the concept of overall, design symmetry,
- abandonment of the use of the general waiting room of the larger size than the other rooms in the main building,
- abandonment of porched entry,
- abandonment of the use of transverse gables in the centre of the main building to identify the pedestrian entry point,
- introduction of gentlemen's waiting rooms,
- expansion and relocation of the toilet facilities,
- introduction of "air closets" to ventilate toilets,
- provision of a six feet wide verandah on the road elevation using a combination of single and paired cast iron columns to support the awning,
- utilisation of a concave shape roof for the road elevation in contrasting, striped painting,
- decorative rendered band of mortar along both sides of the structure and above the windows.
- extensive expression of cast iron lacework on the road elevation verandah,
- introduction of small vents on each side of the roof (usually, two or three vents),
- constant building width.

This modified design featured a higher level of presentation that had been seen in the pre-1888 examples. The additional embellishments were evidence of the surprising increased amount in capital funds made available in the early 1890s, compared to the last years of the previous decade.

The abandonment of the overall design symmetry was slight but evidence of the asymmetry was reflected in the variable distances between the main building and the pavilions. It was also seen in the off-centre location of the entry doors from the road side of the building.

In the modified version, the ladies' toilets were located in the connection between the main building and the male toilet pavilion. Prior to the introduction of the modified version, the female toilets were contained either within the space of the ladies' waiting room or in a small corner of the male toilet block. In both versions, the ladies' waiting room acted as an ante-chamber to protect the privacy of women using the toilet. The trouble with the pre-1888 arrangement was that only one or two closets could be provided because of the very limited space. The other difficulty with the previous arrangement was the non-existence or very limited existence of ventilation from the female closets. Female toilets had always been designed by men, who apparently thought that ladies did not produce adverse odours to the same extent as gentlemen. The use of ventilators up to 1888 was restricted to either the gables of or on the roof ridge of the toilet pavilion. In the modified version, the ventilators were replaced by tall, terracotta chimneys which were located over each individual closet.

By relocating the closets to the intermediate section between the main building and the male toilet pavilion, additional closets could be provided for women and any adverse odours – if women produced such fractured fragrances – were more effectively dealt with by the use of the "air closets." For the first time, each individual female closet was vented to atmosphere through vertical piped shafts which discharged into above the male and the female closets.

THE EMERGENCE OF A SECOND, MODIFIED STANDARD ROADSIDE DESIGN

The second modification to John Whitton's standard roadside station occurred in 1893. There was only one but an important change in design in those structures that were modified between 1889 and 1891. That change was the abandonment of the use of vertical columns to support the platform awning and the introduction of cantilevered, fabricated awning brackets attached to the walls of the building. With the previous use of vertical columns, it was not possible to extend awnings to the edge of platforms as the columns would prevent the opening of doors on railway carriages. With the absence of vertical posts, the cantilevered awnings were considerably wider and extended close to the edge of platforms. Oddly, the narrow verandah on the road approach was still supported by vertical columns. Whereas those examples constructed to the first modification were located, with one exception, on existing lines, those approved to the second modification were exclusively used on new lines.

LOCATION	APPROVING OFFICER & DATE OF APPROVAL	NO. OF BUILDINGS	LENGTH & WIDTH OF MAIN BUILDING (FEET) & MATERIAL	LENGTH FROM MAIN BUILDING TO PAVILION (FEET)	OTHER FEATURES
Corowa	Henry Deane 14/12/1891	3	56 x 16 Approved for either timber or brick. Built in brick.	20 to toilet block 61 to lamp room	No roof vents.
Cobar	Henry Deane 25/1/1892	3	56 x 16 Brick	20 to toilet block 61 to lamp room	No roof vents.
Forbes and Parkes (common plan)	Henry Deane 28/2/1893	3	87 x 16 Brick	20 to toilet block 32 to lamp room	Gents' waiting room.
Temora	Henry Deane	3	56 x 16	20 to toilet	Lamp room

LOCATION	APPROVING OFFICER & DATE OF APPROVAL	NO. OF BUILDINGS	LENGTH & WIDTH OF MAIN BUILDING (FEET) & MATERIAL	LENGTH FROM MAIN BUILDING TO PAVILION (FEET)	OTHER FEATURES
	10/5/1893		Brick	block 32 to lamp room	set back to the rear building alignment
Lismore	Henry Deane 11/8/1893	3	55 x 15 Timber	20 to toilet block 32 to lamp room	Lamp room set back to the rear building alignment. No paired columns on road side verandah.
Byron Bay	Henry Deane 25/9/1893	3	55 x 16 Timber	20 to toilet block 32 to lamp room	Lamp room set back to the rear building alignment. No paired columns on road side verandah.

This second group of modified roadside design station buildings was not the only building style to receive the large, cantilevered awning brackets. They were applied to the prototype of a new style of brick island platform building at Kiama on 3rd September, 1892, and also to a set of atypical timber buildings at Waverton, which were approved on 15th September, 1892. In addition, bracketed awnings, as a means of eliminating vertical awning posts, was an innovation that Chief Commissioner Eddy introduced from 1890 with the building at Raglan being the first application.

While the platform awning support system was new, why did Henry Deane decide to utilise a posted verandah on the road side of the building? Perhaps, in so doing, Deane gave the structures an appearance of familiarity which travellers would recognize on approach to the station. After the last example of the second modified scheme was approved at Byron Bay station in late 1893, vertical awning posts went

the way of the dinosaur – never again to be used on a New South Wales railway station.

Seven examples were constructed to the second modified, post-Whitton standard roadside design. Five examples were built of brick, namely longer versions at Parkes and Forbes and shorter versions at Cobar, Corowa and Temora. Two timber examples were built of the shorter version in timber at Byron Bay and Lismore. These seven stations represented the very last of the 96 examples of the standard roadside design, which had first appeared in prototype form in 1874 at Gunning. These seven buildings represented the end of the Victorian-styled country railway station on new railway lines.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FORBES BUILDING UPON OPENING

Tenders closed on 3rd May, 1893, for the construction of station buildings and other works at Gregra, Manildra, Meranburn, Bumberry, Moura (Mandagery), Bindogandri (Cookamidgea), Parkes, Tichborne, Daroobalgie, and Forbes on the Molong to Parkes and Forbes Railway. The tenders were to be packaged for three separate parcels, these being:

- No. 1. - Gregra, Manildra, Meranburn, and Bumberry.
- No. 2 - Moura, Bindogandri, and Parkes.
- No. 3. - Tichborne, Daroobalgie, and Forbes.[1]

F. Lemm, junior, was listed as the successful tenderer for the buildings at Gregra, Manildra, Meranburn, Bunbury, Moura, Bindogandri, and Parkes while Fetherston & Barbat won the contract for the construction of station buildings at Tichbourne, Daroobalgie, and Forbes.[2] While Mr Lemm constructed no more station buildings in New South Wales, Fetherstone and Barbat did other work on the Illawarra and Cobar lines.

The platform building at Forbes was a rare instance in the 19th century when a platform building was constructed and available for use on the day of the station opening. Five days before the opening of the station, the press reported that "work is being carried on briskly at the new railway station buildings, to get them completed for the opening of the railway line."[3]

A more comprehensive report was provided by the press in early December, 1893, saying:

> "For the erection of the station buildings at Forbes, Daroobalgie, and Tichborne the tender of Messrs. Fetherston and Barbat, of Newtown, Sydney, was accepted, and their work, too, is just about completed. They commenced

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[1] *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 2nd May, 1893, No. 289, p. 3474.
[2] *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 16th May, 1893, No. 327, p. 3805.
[3] *National Advocate*,13th December, 1893, p. 2.

operations on the 10th of August last and, taking into account the nature and extent of the buildings they have had in hand, it is little short of marvellous that they should have accomplished so much in so short a time. Although they had a number of their own men engaged in connection with the leading trades, they gave employment to a large amount of local labour and Mr. Barbat, who has given the work his constant personal supervision, is spoken of in the highest terms by his employees. The passenger station, which is of brick on concrete foundations, is a roomy and commodious structure, and is adapted for a large amount of traffic. The platform, faced with a deep concrete wall is 200 feet in length, the whole being roofed with iron supported by cantilever brackets. Connected with the passenger station are commodious lavatories, closets, etc., etc., which are fitted with the latest and most complete sanitary arrangements, water being laid, on throughout…… The brickwork of the passenger station, Station Master's residence, and water tower was entrusted by Mr. Barbat to two young men, Messrs. Byrnes and Muller, both residents of Forbes, and it is pleasing to learn that the excellence of their work was most favourably commented on by the inspector during his recent visit".[4]

The station building at Forbes contained all the 13 design elements listed on page two for the second modified type of the standard roadside station.

The designation of the rooms from the Stockinbingal end were:

- Lamp room pavilion (detached from main building)
- "shed" in 32 feet long "yard"
- Station Master's office
- Ticket and parcels office
- General waiting room
- Gentlemen's waiting room
- Ladies' waiting room
- Female toilets in 20 feet long connection to the male toilet pavilion
- Male toilet pavilion

The inclusion of a waiting room for "gentlemen" was extremely rare and was always approved by staff other than John Whitton, who really did not have the budget for such luxuries.

Over the years, the room functions would have changed. The gentlemen's waiting room would not last too long. The Station Master's office subsequently became the parcels office. The original lamp room, which was the pavilion at the Stockinbingal end of the suite of buildings, was a meal room in the 1970s.

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[4] *Molong Express and Western District Advertiser*, 2nd December, 1893, p. 5.

What was missing from the usual railway station was a freshwater tank, either below or above ground. No such facility was provided at Forbes as the station was connected to the reticulated town water supply upon opening of the station. The water was pumped from the town supply up to the 20,000 gallon circular wrought iron tanks in the yard. The Station Master's house and the station buildings were connected directly from the locomotive water supply tank.[5] However, there is a little puzzle. Small doors were placed at the rear of each toilet closet for the exchange of night soil pans. These were the usual practice but it seems strange that they were included in the example at Forbes if, as the press report states, the station was connected to the town water reticulation system.   While station was connected to the town water supply, the toilets were not flushed with reticulated water. The pan service was still in operation in 1934 when a deputation from Forbes Municipal Council asked Commissioner Garside to connect the station toilets to the town sewerage system. The deputation also asked that the station be connected to the town electricity supply. Garside replied that he would think about the matters but one interesting comment he made was that he was considering the use of a motor vehicle for passengers between Parkes and Forbes in place of the rail service.[6]

Forbes station never carried out any postal functions as a post office had existed in the town since 1863.[7]

Did Forbes railway station building possess a particular architectural design? No. While it had some features that made the structure look pretty, it had no distinctive form of architecture but the design did embrace the single Gothic Revival feature of the gabled roof with a moderate pitch. Hence, the design generally has been called by conservation architects using the following words – Railway Gothic, Carpenter's Gothic and simply, New South Wales 19th century railway style.

SUBSEQUENT BUILDING ALTERATIONS

At Forbes, additional cupboards for parcels were provided in the ticket office in August, 1946. The platform was asphalted in 1949.

In 1952, the station was given what was called a "facelift". This comprised of the conversion of an existing window at the Stockinbingal end of the 1893 building into a door to provide direct access from the street into the parcels office. At the same time, the building was repainted.   The local press was not happy with the limit of the upgrading work saying that, while the station was "not a modern building, … the best had been made of the existing structure, both for use and appearance."[8]

Approval was granted in 1960 for the parcels office to be extended about 11 feet, though the addition was constructed in an unsympathetic manner. An opening was

[5] *Daily Telegraph*, 19th December, 1893, p. 5.
[6] *Forbes Advocate*, 16th February, 1934, p. 1.
[7] No author, *A Brief Outline of the History of Forbes*, Forbes and District Historical Society, no date, p. 7.
[8] *Forbes Advocate*, 22nd July, 1952, p. 6.

provided between the existing parcels office at the Stockinbingal end of the main building into the parcels extension. The extension consisted of a hardwood frame with weatherboard walls on each side of the structure. The work was completed on 11th June, 1962.[9] That extension exists in 2017. Adjacent to the extension was the existing out of room, which had been built at an unknown time between 1910 and 1952.[10] Furthest towards Stockinbingal, was the brick lamp room.

THE PLATFORM

As indicated on the plan, the platform was 350 feet by 12 feet wide extending to 15 feet in front of the suite of buildings. That information was incorrect based on the 1893 press report which stated that the platform was only 200 feet long and also incorrect with another press articles saying a platform was 330 feet long. There was a three-rail fence at the rear of the platform and 15 feet long ramps at each end. Also, there was a carriage dock at Sydney end of the platform. It was erected, as was the policy for new lines in the 1890s, on the diagonal to the main line platform.

In the 1890s, there was considerable experimentation with concrete and cement for the use of platform walls. Originally, it was planned that the platform wall at Forbes would be brick with three courses of bricks extending to form the coping on the top. Contrary to the instructions on the plan, the platform wall was concrete poured in situ.

SIGNALLING AND SAFEWORKING

Graham Harper, a giant of signalling and safeworking knowledge, has provided the following comment about the existence of two home signals to protect trains proceeding from Parkes to Forbes. He writes:

"Sometimes it was necessary to have two home signals for the one direction at a station or interlocking. In such cases, the farthest out from the box was called an auxiliary home signal. This nomenclature disappeared under C. B. Byles and the naming of the signals in the order of approach became home for the outermost signal and second home for the next one.

At Forbes, the Up Auxiliary Home was provided in 1893 to allow trains to shunt/run round at the station when a movement was approaching from Parkes. The [second] Home signal protected the station itself and its clearing gave the driver an indication that the line was clear to the dead end [in1893] or to the opposing home signal once the line was extended southwards.

The arrangement at Forbes was a little atypical at the opening. All points were interlocked with the signal frame; in many other terminal stations, no interlocking

[9] D. Sheedy, *Heritage Assessment and Conservation Guidelines for Forbes Railway Station*, unpublished report for State Rail Authority, 1990, no. pag.

[10] A. Loxley, *Forbes Railway Station*, unpublished paper, 1984, p. 21.

existed between points and signals. This seemed to be done on the theory that the stations would normally be staffed for train movements, so there would be someone at hand to check the lie of points before clearing the Home signal.

Despite its importance as a town, Forbes station was almost from the start an operational poor relative of Parkes, which grew larger as lines to Condobolin, Peak Hill, Broken Hill and Tottenham gathered momentum. There was nothing out of the ordinary in its operation as a key locked crossing loop.

The arrangements at the Parkes end with the two home signals lasted until 2010 when train order working was introduced. I suspect that this originally had something to do with the additional movements from this end, including the mail trains and, later, of Comet cars, all of which had to run round, as well as traffic to and from Tichborne and Daroobalgie. Traffic, particularly passenger services, to and from the south tended to be more sparse.

In the 1970s, the Signalling Record Society journal, *Blocking Back*, featured a bit of a debate on the use of second home signals at single line crossing stations and, at that time, Dunedoo was the example used.

Interestingly, when the distant signal from Parkes was fixed at caution in the period leading up to 1935, an additional, working, inner distant was fixed below the home signal. Why this was so is a bit obscure as trains would have to slow right down or even stop at the station to change the staff anyway.

In 1995, a starting signal to Caragabal was added as a part of the ritual surrounding the installation of automatic flashing lights at the Newell Highway level crossing immediately to the south of the station. Around the same time, the working distant signal disappeared as well.

The 1936 diagram and several around it show that Forbes did have a signal box building. Forbes does not appear in Dr. Bob Taaffe's doctoral thesis which tends to mean that he didn't believe the diagrams. Neither would I, except for the fact that the circular attached to the 1936 diagram instructs the guard, when the station was unattended, to obtain the key to the signal box from the Station Master's office and return same once finished with. Whether this was a door key or a key to release a clip preventing the Annet keys from being removed from the frame is not clear.

When I was at Forbes in January 1968, the frame was certainly open and I don't recall seeing any signal box remains there."

CLOSURE

The last passenger service was discontinued on 15th October, 1974 and the station closed in 1990, according to John Forsyth. However, Anne Loxley wrote that the last

passenger train left the station on 26th November, 1983.[11] Since about 1990, the station building has been used as the tourist office for the town of Forbes.

Stuart Sharp

28th May, 2017

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[11] Ibid., p. 26.