

BLAYNEY RAILWAY STATION

WHITTON'S ATTEMPT TO AVOID BLAYNEY

John Whitton, the Engineer in Chief, had got into a bag-full of trouble when he decided to bypass the town of Yass and, about the same time, he was in an equal amount of trouble with the line through Blayney and Orange. Whitton had recommended that the line should pass three miles to the north of Blayney but local Members of Parliament, Andrew Lynch and Ezekiel Baker, felt that it was a gross injustice to the people of Blayney, as well as to the colony generally. They urged the matter upon the Government by organising a deputation and showing Minister Sutherland and Premier Parkes the necessity for taking the railway line through the town of Blayney. They were told that government policy was to take railway lines through the principal producing districts, and not from one point to another regardless of whatever towns might be in the way. The arrival of the railway at Blayney was yet another instance where John Whitton did not get his way. Perhaps that is why he did not attend the opening ceremony to Blayney.¹ As a matter of fact, the case of avoiding the town of Yass was the only victory Whitton ever had in his attempt to build lines to the shortest distance, regardless what towns he bypassed. For example, Whitton intended to avoid taking the railway line into Armidale and Young but was compelled by local politics to serve both towns.

Whitton displayed his displeasure by the location of the station, which was on the edge of town and unlike many other locations such as Bathurst, Orange and Wellington, did not provide direct line of site on the road approach to the station.

THE STATION AT THE OPENING, 1876

John Whitton had approved the plan for Blayney station on 30th March, 1876. Tenders for the construction of station buildings at Blayney closed on 25th April, 1876.² The Blayney station building was constructed by Bathurst contractor, James Douglas as well as Peter Reid and another person and they signed the plan on 29th April, 1876.³ Douglas built many of the station buildings west of Rydal.

The platform building at Blayney was a brick combination structure with a timber kitchen. The structure was very modest in size the idea of combining both a residence and station premises was intended to save money. The accommodation for the Station Master and his family consisted of two bedrooms and two other rooms while the public accommodation comprised a booking office, a general waiting room and a ladies' waiting room. Ladies had one closet for toilet accommodation, as did the men, though the males also had a three-stall urinal. The building was another example of what Whitton had provided at Georges Plains, Brewongle, Tarana and Rydal but the Blayney example was the last one of that single-story style built on the

¹ *Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advertiser*, 11th November, 1876, p. 4.

² *NSW Government Gazette*, 7th April, 1876, Issue No. 113, p. 1422.

³ *NSW Government Gazette*, 19th May, 1876, Issue No. 157, p. 1937.

western line. A similar structure was planned for but not built at Spring Hill. The design was Gothic influenced by with minimal design features, these being restricted to the bargeboards on the gables, the cast iron bases to the awning columns, the cast iron brackets at the top of the timber awning columns and the spandrels (i.e. the ends) on the platform awning.

The line to Blayney was opened on 1st November, 1876, the same day as the extension from Bowring to Binalong was opened. Both Binalong and Harden Stations were to receive the same sort of building that was provided at Blayney but they were not built and, instead, featured temporary timber buildings. Although the western line had been opened to Bathurst in April, 1876, Whitton had not completed the platform building at that platform and it was just finished in time for the opening to Blayney. Delaying the construction of buildings until after the handover to the Railway Commissioner was one of the techniques Whitton used to save money, as it was then the responsibility of the Commissioner to fund any incomplete works. No record is available to indicate whether the residents of Blayney considered their station building appropriate for the status of the town.

Within two years of the station opening in 1878, Andrew Lynch, the Parliamentary representative, told Parliament about the “want of protection for passengers (on the platform) against the weather.”⁴ Nothing happened.

Ten years after the station opening, the town residents organised a deputation in March, 1886, to the Minister for Public Works, William Lyne, seeking a new station building at Blayney.⁵ By that stage, the leading citizens would have been aware of the high-class building planned for Young and the moderate but more modern structures planned for Cowra and Carcoar. They would have also known that the combination structure that adorned Blayney station had not been used in the previous decade and that their structure did not reflect the increasing status of the town. Lyne declined to recommend the construction of a new station at Blayney.

As was typical of many line openings throughout New South Wales, the platform buildings were incomplete at the time. Only the foundations had been constructed by the opening date on 1st November, 1876. However, building was reported in the press as being “similar to that at Brewongle”, which was correct but the community was advised that the similar example at Blayney would be larger than the earlier example at Brewongle, which was incorrect. They were both the same size.⁶

THE PLATFORM

Unusual for the New South Wales Railways was the use of bluestone for the wall of the platform. It had a brick coping and a later addition of two courses of brickwork. The platform was 240 feet long by nine feet wide, extending to 12 feet wide in front of the platform building. At the rear of the platform was a three-rail fence. Also,

⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th March, 1878, p. 3.

⁵ *The Richmond River Herald and Northern District Advertiser*, 27th August, 1886, p. 3.

⁶ D. J. Chamberlain, *Diary of a Challenge*, privately published, no date, p. 85.

there was a 60 feet long carriage dock at the Sydney end. Ramps at each end of the platform were the usual 15 feet long. The time it was built, there was no standard width of platform and examples of both 9 feet and 12 feet wide platforms were common. The platform at Gunnedah in 1878 became the last example of a 9-foot-wide platform. From then on, the standard became 12 feet wide. Another interesting feature of the platform was the use of a three-rail fence at the rear. This style was only been introduced in 1876 and the platform at Blayney was one of the first uses of this design feature, no doubt adopted to replace picket fencing to save money. It can only be assumed that the rare use of bluestone for the platform wall was selected because it was the cheapest, local product available. It is known that there was a local bluestone quarry in operation as the school at Millthorpe in 1876 was also built of bluestone.⁷

CHANGES FOLLOWING THE OPENING OF THE CONNECTING LINE TO COWRA AND DEMONDRILLE IN 1888

On 1st July, 1889, George Cowdery, the Engineer in Chief for Existing Lines, approved alterations to the existing building at Blayney. The residential half of the building had been vacant since 1885, when the Station Master and his familiar relocated into a stylish, brick residence built specially for him. The internal space was guttered to provide an enlarged ladies' waiting room, a first-class gentlemen's waiting room, a refreshment room and kitchen.⁸ A new, much larger, detached brick male/female toilet block was also erected immediately on the Orange side of the 1876 building. Women went from having one closet to three closets while the men went from one to four closets, plus a six-stall urinal. One can safely bet that it was a man who determined the new toilet accommodation. The timber kitchen associated with the residence was demolished.

In addition, Cowdery approved the construction of a new combined booking/parcels office and a new telegraph office to a similar design as the 1876 building. Unusually, he built the structure at the up most Sydney end of the platform but the buildings did not face the railway line as was the practice but were located across the platform. Each of the two offices were 20 feet by 18 feet internal.

Railway Surveyor Biddulph was at Blayney station in early October, 1888, planning the alterations proposed to be undertaken. Robert Forster, C.M. McClure and A. and H. Taylor signed the contract on 21st August, 1889. The work was carried out in October and November, 1889.⁹ Also, the original 1876 single-sided platform was converted into an island platform with two extra lines being laid on the southern side for use by trains to and from the Cowra line. A new platform weather shelter 236 feet

⁷ M. K. Nesbitt, *Millthorpe – Days Gone By*, privately published, 1988, p. 16.

⁸ Bathurst Post, 15th May, 1889, p. 2.

⁹ *Evening News*, 4th November, 1889, p. 5.

long was built on the main line side of the platform.¹⁰ This awning provided weather shelter between the 1876 and 1889 buildings. The estimated total cost of the alterations was about £1,700.¹¹ It seems that Cowdery, unlike John Whitton, did desire to provide improved facilities in the buildings he approved. Stations with gentlemen's waiting rooms were rare but, in 1889, four buildings were altered to include this facility. One special feature Cowdery wanted to add to the 1876 building was the placement of a pediment on the roof with "Blayney" on it. That was an extremely rare occurrence on the NSW Railways and such a decoration was only done under the control of George Cowdery. Whitton never had sufficient funds to approve such non-essential decoration. Cowdery also had an afterthought about the awning posts for the new at the Sydney end of the platform. He wrote "note all brackets to posts are to be cast-iron in lieu of wood as shewn (sic) (on the plan).

POST 1890 CHANGES – THE TIMBER PERIOD

In 1896, two buildings that were the invention of Chief Commissioner Eddy were erected. The first one was a carriage shed, now gone, but the second one survives, being an out of shed that was located near the 1876 building. In 1902, the out of shed burnt down and was rebuilt into its present configuration. It has a gabled roof and, next to it, is a "cage for parcels and out of traffic from Cowra branch." It measured 20 feet by 10 feet and had previously been in use at Strathfield station as a cream shed. It was provided in 1936. This structure has a single-pitched roof.

In 1911, a new timber telegraph office measuring 12 feet by 14 feet internal was added to the rear of the brick booking office at the Sydney end of the platform. The external walls had the usual rusticated weatherboards. It had a single-pitched roof and exists today. The internal walls had horizontally-set lining boards with a beaded edge. Alongside the 1911 telegraph office is another surviving timber structure measuring 12 feet by 12 feet internal that was provided in 1944 for a Traffic Inspector. He received a hand washing basin as well as a Dumpy stove as befitting his status.

Part of the platform was covered with bitumen in 1901 and the remainder was completed 1905.

The back platform at Blayney features the unusual use of brickwork with an old-rail frame. The platform wall is non-standard. Rather than concrete poured in situ around the frame of old rails using formwork, brickwork was used between the vertical old rails. Platform No. 2 at Bathurst was similarly treated. It is unknown when the work at Blayney was done but it occurred possibly in 1944 when the platforms were extended to 600 feet.

THE SIGNAL BOX

¹⁰ A similar but shorter awning was also built on the opposite side of the platform in 1902.

¹¹ *Evening News*, 10th October, 1889, p. 3.

A sort-of signal box was erected about 1925 but its design is unauthenticated. As Blayney was a key-locked interlocking, it was not large. It closed in 1977. Dr Bob Taaffe are supply the following comments:

“The 1919 interlocking machine of 16 levers was located under the station awning. At some stage, possibly about 1925, a basic covering was provided over the levers but without a front wall. It may have been that a proper signal box was to be provided when the duplication went through Blayney. Of course, duplication works were suspended and Blayney remained a single line station.

About 1948, a design was prepared for an 80-lever elevated signal box for Blayney. Priorities were changed and the design was altered for Wyong. At Wyong, the pit was constructed towards the country end of the down platform but the building was not erected. It is believed the machine may have been constructed and reused elsewhere.”¹²

RESIDENCES

The Station Master resided in the 1876 combination building on the platform until 1885, when he relocated to an attractive single story house within the railway corridor virtually opposite the platform building on the town side of the platform. There was one very special aspect about the design of the 1885 residence. It featured what is known as a faceted bay window on the street elevation. That means that the window formed three sides of an octagon. That was an expensive and complicated design feature and was rarely used on the New South Wales Railways but, interestingly, there were three examples of residences with a bay window within the region – at Bathurst in 1880 (two-storey), Blayney in 1885 and the residence for the Station Master at Orange built in 1886.

The Blayney Station Master resided in the 1885 structure until 1948 when the Department of Railways designed and built for him a new brick structure at 30 Ogilvy Street. The structure survives and is in private ownership. The plan for the residence had been prepared in 1945 and the delay of three years until construction was consistent with the minimal new buildings erected on the New South Wales Railway system after World War 2. It was amongst the last residence designed by the Department of Railways, this work been taken mostly over by the Housing Commission from 1948.

Also built in 1876 was a brick gatehouse at the level crossing, which was square in footprint with the chimney at the apex of the hipped roof. This was the first gatehouse that Whitton had provided since one built at Wallerawang in 1869. He had changed his design from his Gothic influenced style over the Blue Mountains to his more functional style that he continued to use until 1889, mostly for the level crossings.

¹² Email from Dr Bob Taaffe dated 17th April, 2017.

Robert Ranken, the Chief Engineer for Existing Lines, approved on 30th January, 1929, alterations to the refreshment room and, at the same time, additions to the 1919 timber cottage which had been built for the refreshment room staff. Originally, the cottage consisted of three bedrooms and a living room but in 1928 a plan was prepared for an additional three bedrooms, one of which was for “boys.” The residence is extant.

WHAT’S SPECIAL ABOUT THE RAILWAY AT BLAYNEY?

There are several interesting features about the Railway at Blayney. These are:

- the location of the station, demonstrating the conflict between John Whitton and politicians about the route of the line,
- first use of a gatehouse since Wallerawang,
- the last use of a single-story combined residence/office on the western line,
- the rare use of bluestone for the original platform wall,
- the early use of a three-rail fence at the rear of the platform,
- the positioning of the two-room building across the Sydney end of the platform,
- the rare use of a faceted bay window in the 1885 residence for the Station Master,
- the rare existence of a gentlemen’s waiting room as part of the 1889 alterations,
- the relatively rare use of an island platform on the western line,
- the rare use of a long weather awning connecting the two platform buildings,
- the relatively rare use of a footbridge, constructed in 1910, at the level crossing, &
- the late construction of the residence at 35 Ogilvy Street for the Station Master.

There are also additional surviving artefacts not associated with the station.

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