

ST. MARYS RAILWAY STATION



Another loaded coal train zooms into St. Marys station on 14th September 2018.

A STRUCTURE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE STATION HISTORY

The history of St. Mary station may be divided into four time periods, these being:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1862-1887 | featuring a single story combined office/residence for the single line |
| 1887-1943 | identified by the use of a pigeon pair of late Victorian buildings for track duplication |
| 1943-1993 | associated with the impact of World War 2 and manifested by the construction of one new Inter War Functionalist building and the retention of one late Victorian building |
| 1993 to date | coupled with the creation of CityRail and linked by the replacement of the Inter War Functionalist building with an awning and the retention of the one late Victorian building |

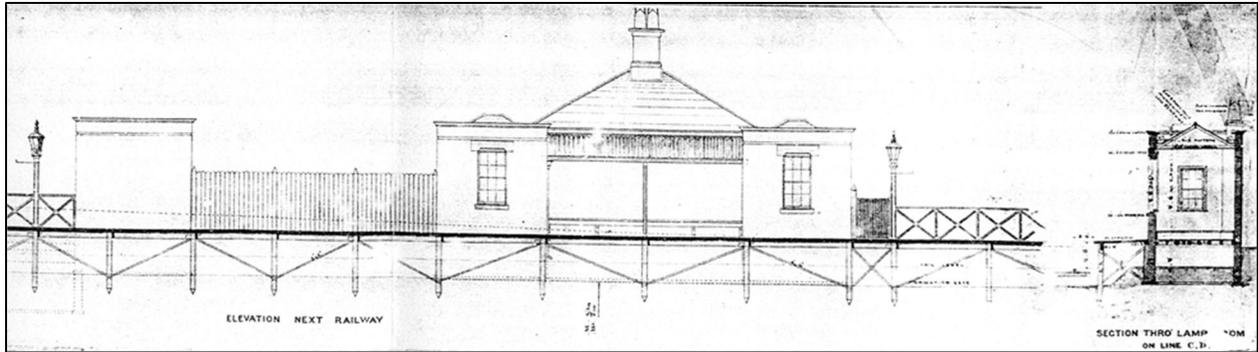
FIRST PERIOD: 1862-1887



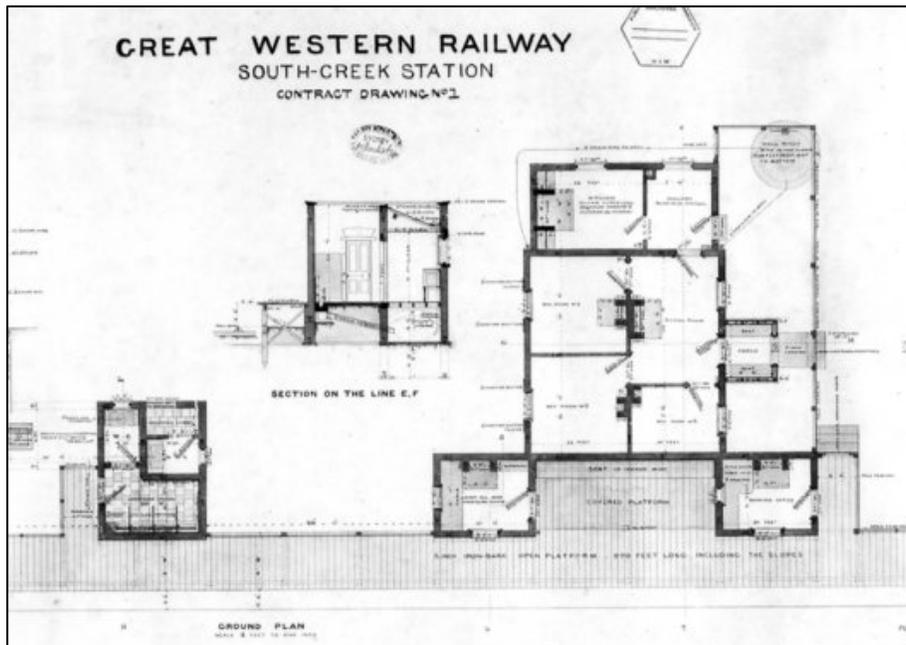
*No photographs exist that indicates the first building at St. Marys. However, the combination building at Rooty Hill was of the same overall design though smaller, having only four rooms under the main roof, as reflected by the central chimney at the apex of the roof. Like the building at St. Marys, the Rooty Hill structure was replaced during World War 2. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 001281, ARHS Railway Archives.*

KEY POINTS OF THE FIRST PERIOD

- St. Marys was only station opened with the opening of the section between Blacktown and Penrith in 1862
- The building was a six room combination office/residence using the same plan for Branxton. Similar-designed buildings existed at Blacktown and Rooty Hill (which opened only as a goods siding)
- The St. Marys structure was of brick construction and located on the southern side of the line
- The distinguishing architectural feature was the hipped roofs with a large, single, brick chimney in the apex of the roof
- The platform had a timber sub-structure and timber deck
- The relatively small size of the building and the minimisation of external decoration reflected the limited availability of capital funds.
- John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief, approved a modestly sized building that was able to withstand the political criticism which maintained his construction standards were too expensive.



The combination building at St. Marys in 1862 was an exact copy of that provided at Branxton in 1861. Both contained six rooms under the main roof. Above is the part of the plan which shows the elevation facing the platform. The St. Marys structure was version No. 3 of Whitton's use of combination structures. That variation was identified by the addition of a symmetrically positioned lamp room facing the platform at the opposite corner to the booking office.

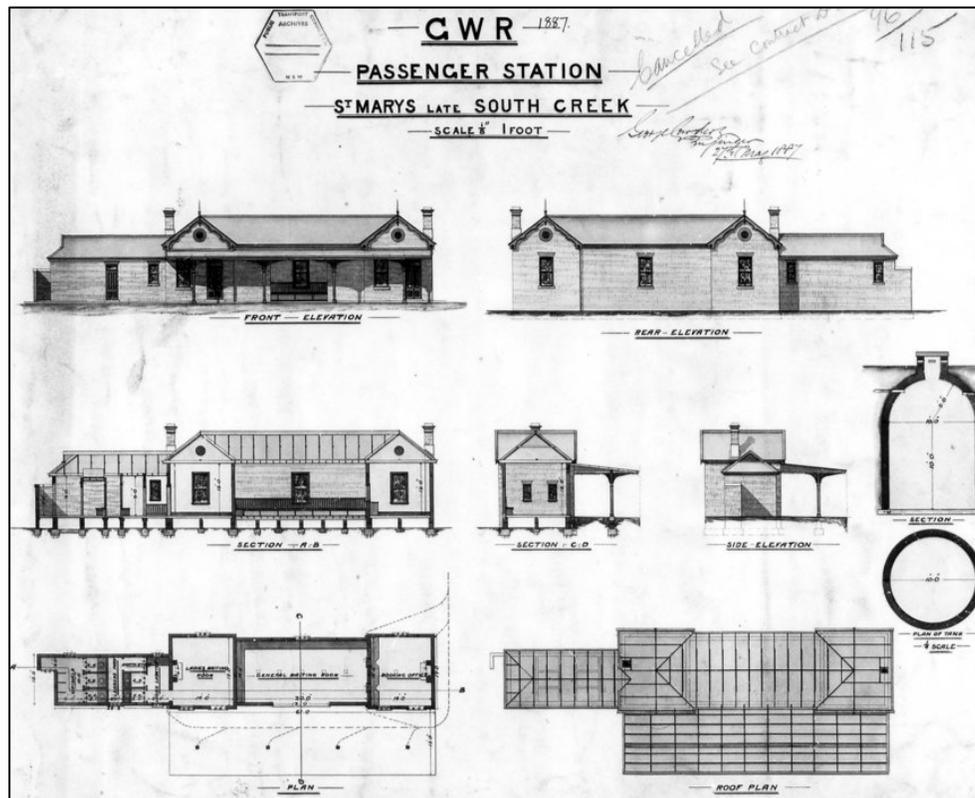


The vast majority of the single-storey, combination offices/residences contained four rooms under the main roof. However, the structures at St. Marys and Branxton possessed two additional rooms, making them the largest examples of the single-storey, combination type. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. E1053602 ARHS Railway Archives.

SECOND PERIOD: 1887-1943

KEY POINTS OF THE SECOND PERIOD

- The New South Wales Railways decided to demolish the 1862 building and construct new structures on both platforms.
- The New South Wales economy had gone into deficit in 1886 for the first time in two decades or so. While the overall sums of money allocated to the Railway Department were large, they were insufficient for all the work required to be done. Economies had to be made.
- Whereas the 1862 building was located on the south side of the line, the more important and larger structure in 1887 was located on the northern side of the line.
- The Engineer-in-Chief for Existing Lines, George Cowdery, had approved the first replacement building at St. Marys on 27th May 1887, which featured an open-fronted general waiting room 30 feet long with an overall building length of 76 feet.



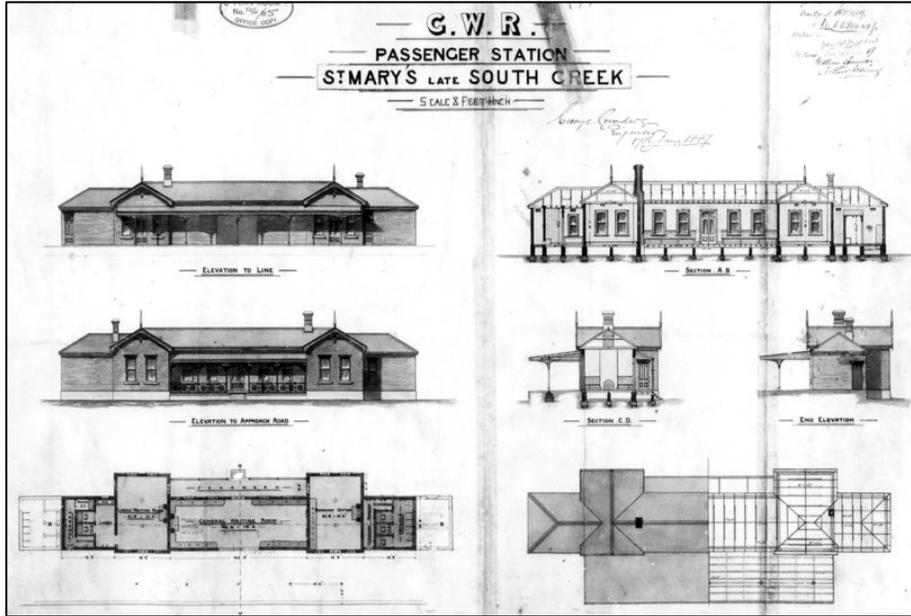
The foregoing is a copy of the first plan issued in 1887 for St. Marys, which showed a plain-looking, utilitarian structure. It was of modest architectural interest and possessed some manifestations of the Gothic Revival style. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. E11053600 ARHS Railway Archives.



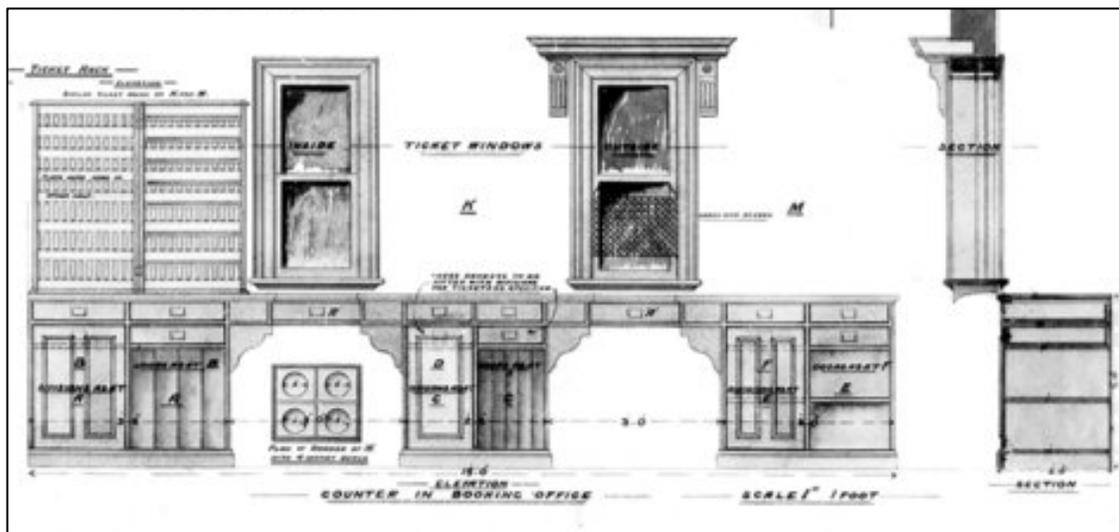
The above photograph shows the 1887 goods shed. It was one of only a few brick goods sheds, others being at Penrith, Liverpool, Goulburn and Waratah. For St. Marys to receive such an attractive building, someone of influence must have resided nearby. The photograph was taken on 22nd January 1977.

- The local politician protested to the Government about the proposed, approved design of the 1887 plan
- At political direction, George Cowdery abandoned the first, cheaper plan and approved a second plan on 17th June 1887 for a much larger structure with a waiting room 40 feet long and an overall length of 102 feet.
- The major difference between the first and second approved buildings was in the asymmetrical layout of the May building, which had both the male and female toilets located at one end.
- The June building split the toilet locations and placed them at opposite ends of the structure and, in the process, made the building symmetrical in design and floor plan.
- Another difference between the first and second structures was the lack of rear pedestrian access through the structure in the May proposal and the provision of

such rear access through the centre of the June building using a stepped entry and a rear verandah 40 feet long by 5 feet 6 inches wide.



This is the plan for the second St. Marys structure of 1887. The obvious feature is the overall symmetrical floor plan. Another obvious change was the provision of rear, pedestrian entry through the centre of the building. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. E1053599 ARHS Railway Archives.



This enlargement of the architectural detail shows the elegant design of the St. Marys ticket counter. On the extreme left is the hinged ticket rack which was closed and locked when not in use. The window towards the left is the view of the ticket window from the ticket office and the

window towards the right is the view of the ticket window from the general waiting room.
SOURCE: Photograph No. E1053595 ARHS Railway Archives.

A brick waiting shed with a large open-fronted general waiting room was approved for the opposing platform at St. Marys, though the plan does not survive.

The design of the waiting shed was consistent with other examples in the Sydney metropolitan area, such as Strathfield, Lidcombe, Tempe, Stanmore and Granville.



This sketch of the buildings at St. Marys appeared in the Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser on 2nd August 1890, p. 256. The artist is facing west. Although difficult to see, it shows buildings on the platforms roughly equating with the planned structures. However, the roof on the eastbound platform building is inconsistent with the 1887 plans. It appears that there was an existing shed on that platform and the Railway Department decided to retain it. The 1887 structure is behind the existing shed.

The minimal decoration on the St. Marys buildings reflected the functional nature of the buildings, which could only be described, clumsily, as typical, Gothic Revival-influenced 1880s New South Wales Railway buildings.

Tenders closed on 26th July 1887 for the “construction and erection, complete, of a new Passenger Station, etc., on the Up Platform at St. Mary's”.¹ The firm of Ring and Spouncer was awarded the contract on 5th August 1887.² St. Marys was the only known station building erected by this building partnership.

¹ *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 8th July 1887, No.376, p. 4440.

² *Ibid.*, 9th August 1887, No.449, p. 5188.



*This photograph, taken on 10th April 1953 shows the 1943 building on the left and the 1887 waiting shed on the right-hand platform. Of particular interest on the westbound platform on the right-hand side is the male toilet which was located approximately in the centre of the platform. The structure is unusually tall and may have concealed a water tank to flush the urinal and closets. At that time, septic tanks were in use on each platform. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 001302 ARHS Railway Archives.*

THIRD PERIOD: 1943-1993



The very unusual aspect of the construction of the new platform building and signal box in the 1940s was the noticeable reduction in the level of presentation. This January 1977 photograph shows the complete absence of ornamental brickwork on the gables, a feature on all similarly designed structures westward of Westmead. The explanation is speculation. Note the attempt to provide order with the words “in” and “out” written on each side of the ticket window. The rubbish bins are of two types. On platform No. 2 is the old-fashioned round top with a spring-loaded cover while the small bins on platform No. 1 are a manifestation of the policy of the Public Transport Commission of the 1970s. When originally built in 1943, the fencing between the bottom of the stepway was formed by timber posts and rails and extended all the way to the ticket window.³ It was replaced and truncated in the 1960s by the usual roll-top, galvanised mess fencing.

KEY POINTS OF THE THIRD PERIOD

- William Beaver approved on 4th August 1942 a brick building on platform Nos. 1 and 2 but he left the remaining building, dating from 1887, on the Penrith-bound platform.
- The 1942 structure at St. Mary’s was of moderate size, but clearly designed by someone different to the other buildings between Westmead and Toongabbie.
- There were two striking features that made the structure different to those between Westmead and Seven Hills. Firstly, there was the use of a brick parapet enclosing a gabled roof on all four sides of the structure, rather than parapets restricted to the roof terminals for the structures between Westmead and Toongabbie.
- Secondly, both ends of the building were square, unlike those between Westmead and Toongabbie which had one end rounded. Behind the roof parapets at St. Marys, the double-pitched roof was covered with corrugated asbestos cement sheets.
- The St. Marys structure had all the identifying features of the Inter-War Functionalist style, including the use of near-flat platform awnings, a string course of contrasting-coloured soldier bricks above the window heads on all external walls and asbestos cement sheets for a soffit between the extended roof joists supporting the platform awnings.
- By 30th of June 1942, the Commissioner reported that the “provision of a new station buildings on the up platform and of a footbridge were either completed or well in hand”.

³ See photograph No. 214656 ARHS Railway Archives.



Cheap design. Note the absence of vertical cover strips between the sheets of asbestos cement. This was purposefully done to emphasise the horizontal expression of the structure.
22nd January 1977

- A new, two level signal box at St. Marys opened on 19th of May 1942.
- The St. Marys signal box followed broadly the Inter War Functionalist design, which was reflected in the use of cover strips restricted to the horizontal joints, the use of a flat roof, wide metal fascias with rounded corners and a rounded building wall facing the Penrith direction.

What was interesting was the idea to erect the signal box using Fibrolite sheets instead of brickwork



This photograph was taken on 22nd January 1977. Noted signalling and safeworking historian, Graham Harper, writes on 12th January 2023: "This photograph looks west from the end of No.1 Platform. It shows the signal box atop a large relay area. Compared with the area for relays, the operating room at first floor level is quite small.

The line branching to the right in the foreground is the A. E. Goodwin Siding. Formerly, during the Second World War, this line extended to Dunheved and served the military's Stores and Transport section close to St. Marys and the Fuse section nearer to Dunheved. The 1949 rail recovery project saw the lifting of the line at the Dunheved end, as well as at other locations in the Ropes Creek area, leaving only the St. Marys end connected. When the lifted tracks were replaced in 1957, the Dunheved end of this siding was never reconnected.

Carefully examined, the stairway from the signal box operating floor shows a definite levelling at about half the height of the relay room window. The stair hand rail closest to the building shows this levelling, while that closest to the running line shows a gap. A small landing extends towards the running line from this point, and this was undoubtedly allowed the signaller to hand out or collect the staff for the branch during the single line period 1949-1957. Of course, if a movement were necessary between the Branch and Platforms 2, 3 or 4, the signaller would have to supply/collect the staff from platform or ground level.

The double light colour light signal beside the box can take a train to Werrington or Dunheved, depending on which points have been set. The signal appears to have narrower lens cases than most signals of the type. This is possibly due to restricted clearances between the line and the signal box access stairway.

Also of note is the very unusual [unique?] shunt ahead signal placed beneath the main signal lights. Electronically controlled disc signals were not unknown in NSW, but I cannot recall one being painted with an 'S' and used as a shunt ahead. The purpose of this signal at St. Marys is unknown. Clearance of the signal allows a train to shunt as far as a limit board, which can be

discerned, with considered squinting, just before the colour light signal in the distance. What purpose could be attributed to such a move is beyond me.

Finally, the pedestrian crossing over the running lines can be discerned in the middle distance. This crossing was the remnant of a full road crossing which was replaced by the Glossop Street overbridge to the east of the station around 1957. The pedestrian booms continued to be operated from the St. Marys box for quite some time after the diversion of the road traffic”.⁴



*This photograph shows the building on platform Nos. 1 and 2 well advanced in 1943. Note that the 1887 toilets remained on the platform at the far end but would be demolished once the new structure was completed **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 001294 ARHS Railway Archives.*

⁴ Email from Graham Harper on 12th January 2023.



22nd January 1977 is the date of the photograph. It captures the essence of the New South Wales Railways of old – basic, dirty and under-funded. Only a strip of bitumen has been provided towards the edge of each platform with Locksley crushed granite being the remainder of the surface. The platform seat is painted using 3801 special green, which was the standard colour applied to several items, including platform seats. The 1887 building on the left was extended at the eastern end in 1952 to provide space for the male toilet. The small window in the toilet marks the location of the closet. The male toilet was formerly free-standing further to the east on the same platform. At the bottom of the stepway on platform Nos. 3 and 4 is the ticket collector's cabin, which is of a standard design dating from the 1940s. The 1943 building is on the right.

- In 1981, a canopy was placed over the deck and stepways of the footbridge and along the walkway to the bus shelter. As part of the project, canopies were provided on both platforms between the bottom of the stepways and the existing buildings.



In 1956, the on-platform parcels office was relocated to the goods shed in an effort to lower the number of staff. Such relocations occurred elsewhere in the decades between 1950 and 1987. No doubt the goods siding was electrified in 1955 or so when track electrification was extended from Blacktown to Penrith. Taken in January 1977.

FOURTH PERIOD: 1993 TO DATE



It is 1993 and CityRail's objective was to replace the 1981 platform awnings on both platforms starting at the bottom of the stepways as well as the demolition of the 1943 building on platform Nos. 1 and 2. CityRail engaged a contractor to demolish the 1943 platform building. The

booking office has already gone. Despite being presented with information about the heritage significance of the building, demolition went ahead. The Authority argued that there were many similar buildings. That was true but the significance of the building at St. Marys was considerable because of differences with other locations of the same time period. Demolition was completed in March 1995.



Work was under way in 1993 in preparation for the erection of new platform awnings.

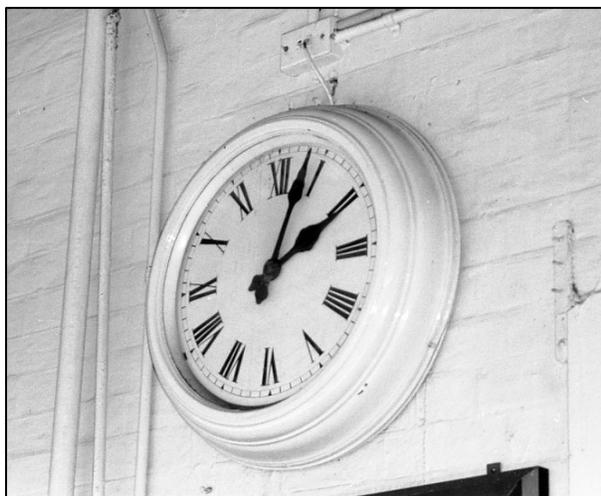


CityRail had already painted the lamp posts red in 1993 before the replacement awnings were erected. An interesting architectural feature, dating back to the 1850s, was to reduce the width of platform buildings at both ends. The demolition of the booking office above aided the

observation of this feature. The red painted internal door is not another case of CityRail red being splashed everywhere. The two locks on the door identify restricted staff access. The room may have housed PA or CCTV equipment and entry by station staff was unauthorised. The multi-level car park was yet to be built.



It is the 7th February 1997 and the overhead booking office, lifts and new awnings have been standing for two years. The platform awnings were subsequently extended eastward on both platforms.



A contrast in electric clocks at St. Marys. A traditional NSW Railways clock is on the left and CityRail's effort is on the right. The pictures were taken on 7th February 1997 and 30th November 2022.



If one travels to St. Marys in 2023, they may note that some aspects of this 1997 scene has changed.

KEY POINTS TO THE FOURTH PERIOD

- Plans were prepared in 1994 for the canopy on platform Nos. 1 and 2. The existing 1981 canopy on platform Nos. 3 and 4 was replaced and widened in 1994 and a narrow canopy was added to the rear of the 1887 building, as well as the short extension at the eastern end of the building.
- Edwards Madigan Torzillo Briggs received the commission to demolish the 1942-approved Inter War Functionalist building on platform Nos. 1 and 2 at St. Marys. A recording of the structure was made prior to demolition. The 1942 building was replaced by an awning.
- The demolition of the St. Mary structure on platform Nos. 1 and 2 represented, along with the buildings at Westmead, the first examples of the demolition of the wartime Inter War Functionalist buildings erected between Westmead and St. Marys.
- Plans were prepared in March 1995 the installation of easy access lifts at St. Marys together with a booking office on a new concourse. The structure had a hipped roof and the walls were constructed of compressed fibre cement panels. Clocks were placed in the lift towers.
- In 1994–95, work included covering the footbridge deck and stairs and a new overhead booking office designed by Spooner Harris & Associates. The 1995

works also involved replacing the canopy on the platform as well as the platform Nos. 1 & 2 building.⁵

- Moore and Cashell Architects issued plans in November 2000 for an additional 40 feet long by 7 metre wide canopy to be erected at St. Marys on platform Nos. 1 and 2 to the east of the existing 1994 canopy. It had been constructed by November 2001.
- In 2000, plans were issued for an additional canopy on platform Nos. 1 and 2 located east of the existing 1994 canopy.
- CCTV was installed in 2001.
- The original hydraulic lifts were replaced in 2011 with electric lifts.
- The four level car park was opened in 2010 with another two levels approved in 2022
- An additional canopy was built on platform Nos. 3 and 4 post 2018 east of the 1887 building.

Stuart Sharp

25th August 2023



Off we go home on 30th November 2022. Farewell St. Marys.

⁵ Wikipedia