WONDABYNE

THE SHORTEST AND LONGEST OPEN, UNATTENDED STATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Neil Munro has been and continues to be a frequent train traveller through Wondabyne station. He has a lifelong interest in the railways of New South Wales, which is manifested by his employment in the various organisations that have operated the State rail system. He has donated thousands of photographs to the Australian Railway Historical Society. In the above picture, Neil has captured a trailing photograph of four-car double-deck interurban set V7 working N138 service from Newcastle to Sydney approaching Wondabyne, which is just out of sight beyond the second curve, but this service is not scheduled to stop until Hornsby. The trailing carriage, coded DJM, carries one of the short-lived CityRail colour schemes that only appeared on some of the fleet. One of the obvious features at Wondabyne is the quarry with the attendant supervisor's cottage near the station. A not uncommon question by train passengers was "What is that cottage? Is it for the Station Master?" The usual response from cheeky Central Coast commuters was "That's the Wondabyne Workers' Club. They do a wonderful seafood lunch on Sundays!" Note some youthful yahoo holding one of the doors open. What a man! The date is 28th April 1997. SOURCE: Neil Munro.

EXISTING DOCUMENTATION

Is it a mere co-incidence that, for the station that is so isolated, there is not a single architectural plan that survives about structures at any of the sites? The implication of that frustration is an almost total reliance on secondary sources, most of which do not refer to the platform structures.

Wondabyne station's geography, with its four sites, as well as its history is concealed, to a degree.

Railway historian, C. C. Singleton, wrote a series of articles dealing with the line between Sydney and Newcastle. The September 1965 issue of *Bulletin*, pages 174 and 175 gives details of Wondabyne.[1] The only item of interest that captured Singleton's interest about the station was the transfer of the name to four different sites.

Historian, Ian Wallace, has also written a brief history of the Short North, which includes Wondabyne in *Byways of Steam 10* with particular reference to the stone quarry.[2] Like Singleton, apart from the dates of the relocation of the platforms, he does not entertain a history of the station itself and, indeed, does not have a photograph of the various structures. Another study dealing with the quarry is Ray Love's article in *Diesel Scene 3*.[3]
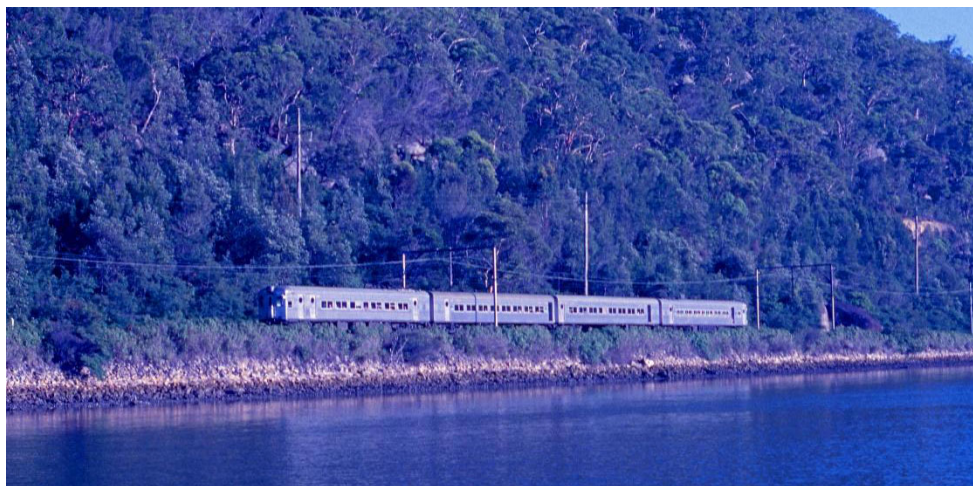
Four-car single-deck interurban U set working No.122 service to Sydney is at last enjoying fast track on the approach to Mullet Creek tunnel and the Hawkesbury River Bridge after the slower pace from Wondabyne around the almost continuous curved track alignment. This image, and others to follow at this location, was captured on 12th March 1978 from a

[1] C. C. Singleton, "The Short North – The Sydney-Newcastle Link Railway", *Bulletin*, September 1965.

[2] I. Wallace, Hawkesbury River to Woy Woy, *Byways of Steam 10*, Matraville, Eveleigh Press, 1995, pp. 33-43.

[3] R. Love, "The Sandstone Siding at Wondabyne", *Diesel Scene 3*, Matraville, Eveleigh Press, 1996, pp. 105-119.

Halvorsen motor cruiser hired by Enfield and Eveleigh enginemen and friends on principally a fishing weekend. Neil Munro took the photograph and also explains the change in the numbering system for trains. He writes: "In the 1970s, it was the practice with train numbers to write the abbreviation, No., followed by the numeral/s for the train, such as No. 4, No. 71. No 185 etc. That system changed with computerisation and, in this new era, all trains were entered into computers using a letter code for the area, such as Cxxx (South Coast), Sxxx (South), Wxxx (West) and Nxxx (North) followed immediately by the train number".[4] **SOURCE:** *Neil Munro.*

THE 1880s - THE FIRST USE OF THE STATION NAME, WONDABYNE

All the station sites to which the name, Wondabyne, applied were located on a water way off Hawkesbury River called Mullet Creek.

The first use of the name, Wondabyne, appeared in January 1891 and was applied to the signal box on the northern side of the Hawkesbury River where the double track across the Hawkesbury River bridge met the single line. There was no station by the name Wondabyne at that time, though the photograph below does show a platform which may have been erected as a temporary arrangement for the opening of the bridge.

Above is the well-known photograph taken of a platform on the Up Main line in 1889 at the time of the opening of the Hawkesbury River bridge. There are more questions than answers relating to the photograph. Was the platform a public facility? Was a platform building later erected? Was there a second platform for the Down Main Line? **SOURCE:** *Facebook*

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[4] Email from Neil Munro on 2nd October 2024.

The double line/single line junction signal box marked the southern end of Mullet Creek to which the name, Wondabyne, was applied. The northern end of Mullet Creek to which the name applied was marked by Mullet Creek station, which was three miles (five kilometres) distant from Mullet Creek Junction signal box at the southern end. Singleton incorrectly says that Mullet Creek station, which had opened on 16th January 1888 was closed on 1st May 1889. Once the Hawkesbury River bridge had opened, he maintains that the station closed. Mullet Creek station had been used as the modal interface between rail to the north and water transport to the south and it is hard to separate it from the history of the Wondabyne station story. Mullet Creek station was located only 400 metres to the north of the present Wondabyne station.
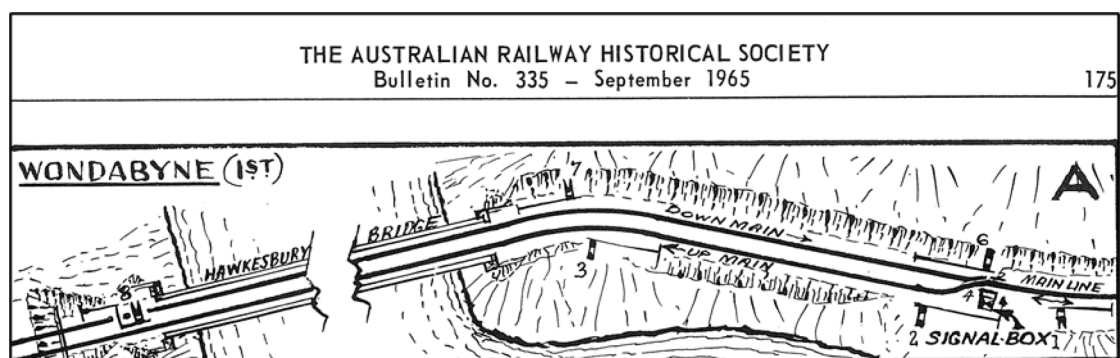
Above is Singleton's drawing of the first site to which the name, Wondabyne, was applied. Note the absence of a platform. **SOURCE:** *ARHS Track and Signal Diagrams, Version 4.*

A pair of Alco diesel locos head north along Mullet Creek with a lengthy super-freighter bound for Acacia Ridge in Queensland. These big trains had a high status with Train Control, not the least because of problems crossing or overtaking other trains on the North Coast. The greatest difficulty with these trains was from Grafton north due to the quite short passing loops. This required these trains to be divided at Grafton and run as two separate trains to Acacia Ridge. The 442-class loco will take a crossing loop length of train on to Brisbane with the 44-class following some minutes later with the rest of the train. The loco

crew will no doubt be enjoying this very scenic part of their sunny morning task. **SOURCE:** *Neil Munro 12th March 1978.*

## THE 1890s – THE CONTINUED LIFE OF MULLET CREEK

WONDABYNE

John Forsyth, former Archives Officer for the State Rail Authority, states that the name, Wondabyne, was adopted in 1891 but, when the signal box closed in 1893, the name fell out of use until 1910 at which time it was used for a station on the duplicated main lines.

MULLET CREEK

The public timetable of 1st January 1890 listed a "town" known as Mullet Creek, which was served by a platform called Mullet Creek. Fares were shown to Mullet Creek platform. The public timetable of 1st March 1893 also shows Mullet Creek platform but no mention of Wondabyne.

Mullet Creek was closed only as a signal box and that there existed a station of that name until 1897.

The Railway Department issued documents in the 1890s utilising the station name, Mullet Creek, from time to time, as in the case for the 1895 special Easter Holiday timetable for that year. Mullet Creek station was still open in October 1896, again being mentioned in a special train brochure.[5]
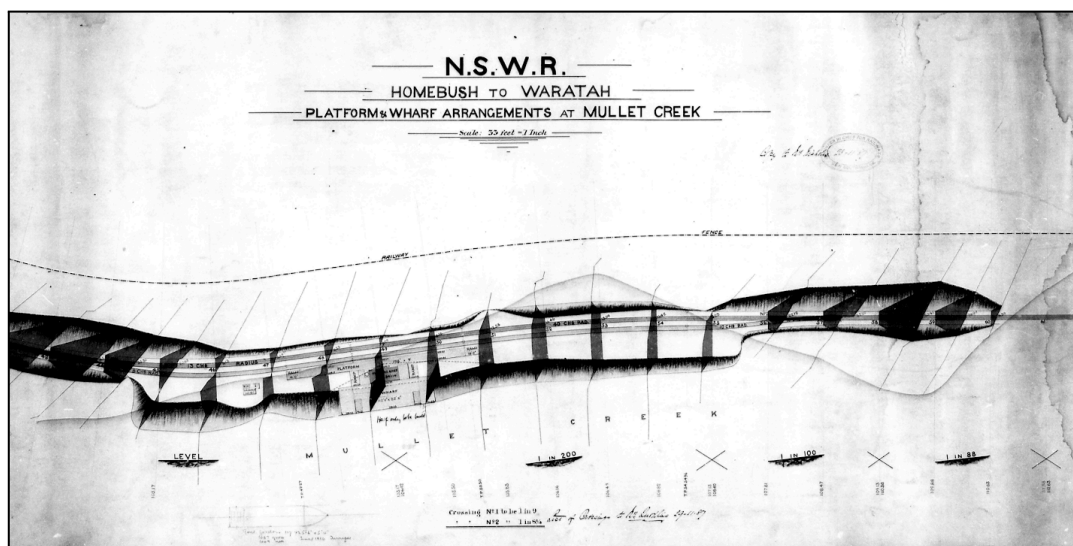
This 1887 plan shows the 198 feet long platform at Mullet Creek with a platform waiting shed 34 feet by 14 feet of unknown design. It was flanked by ramps each side of the shed to a wharf measuring 112 feet 6 inches by 32 feet 6 inches. There was a small, off-platform male

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[5] *The Australian Star,* 3rd October 1896, p. 11.

*toilet at the southern end of the platform. **SOURCE:** ARHS Track and Signal Diagrams, Version 4.*

The Railway Department's *Weekly Notices* kept referring to Mullet Creek in the 1890s. The *Monthly Notice* for July 1893 contained instructions for Mullet Creek to advise Hornsby station on the number of trucks on hand to be lifted. That reference suggests that staff were on duty at Mullet Creek.

Weekly Notice No. 50 of 1897 advises [p.7] that Mullet Creek platform was closed and all stations holding tickets thereto had to remit them to the Traffic Auditor. All these references are to Mullet Creek platform.

There were additional references in the *Weekly Notices* until 1899.[6] After 1899, there was no mention of either Mullet Creek or Wondabyne in public timetables, as far as the available evidence is concerned, until 1910. Nevertheless, the Sydney press had occasional references in 1906, 1907 and 1909 to Wondabyne platform, which was a station that did not exist in those years.[7]
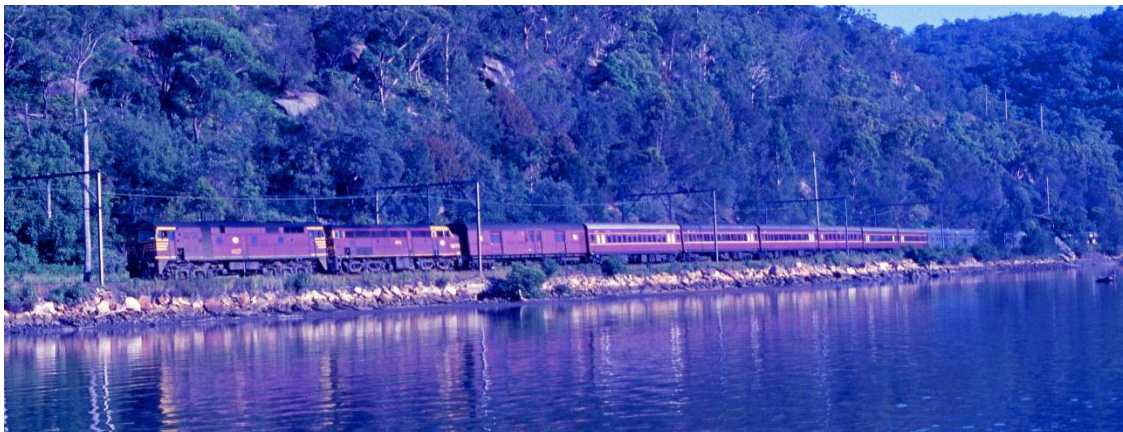
*Locomotives 44227 and 4416 are in throttle eight as No. 4 Gold Coast Motorail Express gathers speed along Mullet Creek towards the Hawkesbury River Bridge. One can imagine passengers in the dining car finishing their breakfast of bacon and eggs with toast and coffee while taking in the impressive view. **SOURCE:** Neil Munro 12th March 1978.*

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[6] For instances, see Weekly Notices No. 7 of 1893, No. 8 of 1894 and No. 21 of 1899 when the reference concerns sectional loads for goods trains.

[7] For example, *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 18th August 1906, p. 4, *The Methodist*, 3rd August 1907, p. 3 and the *Daily Telegraph*, 20th October 1909, p. 14.

Neil Munro also snapped a trailing photograph of 44227 and 4416 on No. 4 Gold Coast Motorail Express moving smartly along Mullet Creek as they draw near to the Hawkesbury River Bridge. Of interest is the HGM power van at the rear of the train that would normally be seen on interstate expresses to Adelaide and Perth. After removal from the car carrier wagons on arrival in Sydney, the passengers' motor vehicles will be sponged down and dried before being reclaimed by their owners. **SOURCE:** *Neil Munro 12th March 1978.*


C. C. Singleton correctly writes that the timber platform at Mullet Creek was 198 feet long by nine feet wide with a ramp at the southern end of the timber station building leading to the wharf used by the stern-wheeler, "General Gordon", which operated between Mullet Creek and Hawkesbury River Wharf. The plan for the platform shows two ramps, one either side of the waiting shed. Hence, Singleton's reference to one ramp is inconsistent with the documentation. No other details are known. **SOURCE:** *https://history.lakemac.com.au.*

Author, Dick Audley, notes that Mullet Creek station was intended to be a temporary facility but speculates that it was the intention of the Railway Commissioners to give travellers the opportunity of passing over the bridge before joining a ferry, a motive that justified the continued existence of this stopping place. He explains:

"Mullet Creek was in fact discontinued as a stopping place for regular trains from 1st May 1889 although no attempt was made to dismantle the platform and the run around loop. The station was opened again as an unattended platform and loop as Mullet Creek Timber Siding on 24th June 1889 where trains stopped on request. The wharf at this station lingered on until duplication (and its advanced state of decay) made demolition necessary, although it does not seem to have been used on a regular basis after 1890)".[8]

Indeed, it was used after 1890 and for seven more years.
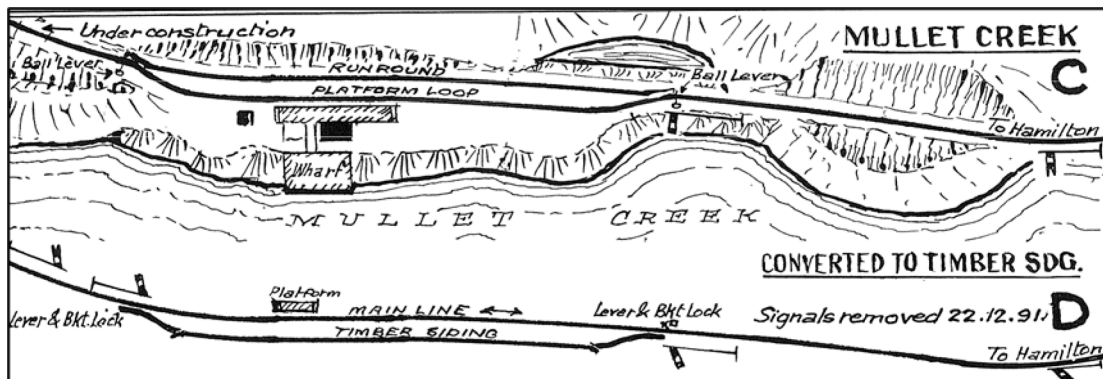
One month after Mullet Creek was closed in 1889, the loop was re-opened as a timber siding. Singleton's drawing shows a platform serving the main line. The platform continued in public use until 1897. Was there a wharf to serve the platform? Did train travellers crossing area where trucks were being loaded with timber? This is most puzzling. **SOURCE:** *C. C. Singleton, "The Short North – The Sydney-Newcastle Link Railway", Bulletin, September 1965, P. 175.*

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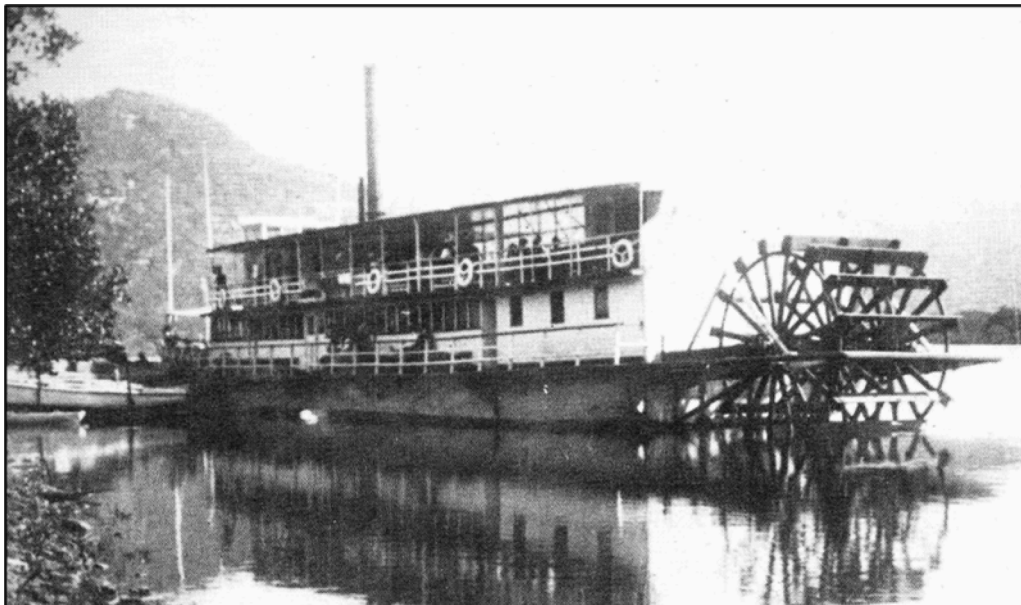
[8] D. Audley, "Passenger Train Working on the Short North 1887-1889", *Bulletin*, February 1984, p. 39 and March 1984, p. 63.

A TROUBLESOME SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE NAME, WONDABYNE

The station existed at four sites. It had three name changes utilising other appellations and was closed and re-opened twice. The table below sets out the geographic and temporal history of the station.

TABLE: STATIONS AND SIGNAL BOXES ON MULLET CREEK – NAMES, LOCATIONS AND DATES OF OPENING AND CLOSING

NAME	TYPE OF FACILITY	OPENING DATE/NAME CHANGE DATE	CLOSING DATE	LOCATION (IN KMS)
Mullet Creek Junction	Signal box	1st May 1889	1890	60.024
Hawkesbury Cabin	Signal box	1890	1891	60.024
Mullet Creek	Signal box & station	16th January 1888	1st May 1897 for signal box and November 1897 for station	65.58
Wondabyne	Signal box	15th January 1891	1st June 1893	60.024
Wondabyne	Signal box	4th October 1901	9th May 1909	64.21
Wondabyne	Signal box & station	November 1910	1st January 1911	63.166
Wondabyne	Signal box & station	platform opened 31st October 1918	Platform closed April 1939	64.527
Wondabyne	Station	April 1939	Current site	65.148

*Four-car double-deck interurban set V26 working N233 service north on 28th April 1997 is now on the rising grade from Wondabyne station to the Woy Woy tunnel. This 1 in 40 climb with curves could be a trap for an unwary driver, particularly in rain or when humid moisture rising at night from the headwaters of Mullet Creek made the cold steel rails quite slippery. Not only steam locos on freight trains could experience adhesion problems here but the Alco A1A-A1A 40-class were also inclined to experience the same problem. Heavy sanding was as much a part of this climb from Wondabyne as it was on the climb from Hawkesbury River to Cowan. **SOURCE:** Neil Munro.*

THE 1900s – THE OPENING OF A NEW LOOP AND SIGNAL BOX

*This 1901 diagram above shows a platform for staff exchanging on the main line and a platform and signal box on the loop. **SOURCE:** ARHS Track and Signal Diagrams, Version 4.*

In 1901, a loop and signal box were opened called Wondabyne and a small, timber residence was approved and built for the signalman. The above signal diagram shows a platform on the main line with an attached signal box located at 64.21 kilometres. Signalling and safeworking historian, Graham Harper comments:

> "Unsurprisingly, the location for the 1901signal box expressed by the Signal and Telegraph Branch (64.21 kilometres) does not match the 1910 station location indicated by the Traffic Branch (63.166 kilometres)".[9]

Engines, 4464 and 44218, head a southbound freight train along Mullet Creek with interesting wagons leading the train including RACE Railways (of) Australia Container Express refrigerated containers on bogie flats. On icy windless winter mornings, the warmer temperature of the water along Mullet Creek caused it to vaporize in the cold ambient atmosphere, the rising mist looking like steam lifting from a plate of hot soup. **SOURCE:** *Neil Munro 12th March 1978.*

There were no public passenger facilities at the Wondabyne signal box until 1910. There are no surviving architectural plans for any structure at any time at any of the four locations but there is one plan for which the building subsequently became available for public use. On 13th November 1907, a plan was issued for a male toilet. It was basic in design and intended for use by the signalman operating the signal box.

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[9] Email from Graham Harper on 24th September 2024.

Ken Winney took the preceding photograph on 14th March 1959, which shows the 1909 signal box, which continued in use as a public waiting room from 1922 at the location prior to the present arrangement. It was relocated in 1939 to the present site and stood until 1960 or so. There was always a need for a safe location out of the weather and the resident wildlife (i.e., animals, not people) and the box on the southbound platform fulfilled that role until the new, elevated parcels box replaced it in the 1960s. **SOURCE:** *Photograph No. 348872, ARHS Railway Archives.*


The above photograph is of No. 7 North West Mail on a dull Friday in 1958. Have a look at the station nameboard on the northbound platform. It was in the 1950s that the Department of Railways commenced to phase out the black and white scheme for station nameboards. Rather than the traditional combination of black and white colours, the Department painted some nameboards with a cream background with brown letters. However, given the amount grime, soot and cinders on the Wondabyne nameboards, it very difficult to determine

whether the station has got dirty black and white nameboards or cream and brown.
SOURCE: *John Stormont, ARHS collection.*

THE 1910s – THE OPENING OF THE PUBLIC PASSENGER PLATFORM

It would appear that, when Wondabyne station reopened as a public facility in 1910, male passengers also utilised the signalman's privy. When the station was relocated in 1939, the male toilet facility was relocated to the new site.

There is no documentary evidence of the reopening of Wondabyne station in 1910. Signalling and safe working historian, Graham Harper, says that the *Weekly Notices* do not mention an opening date. He adds that Wondabyne appears in earlier *Weekly Notices* but they are restricted only to the passing times of trains.[10]
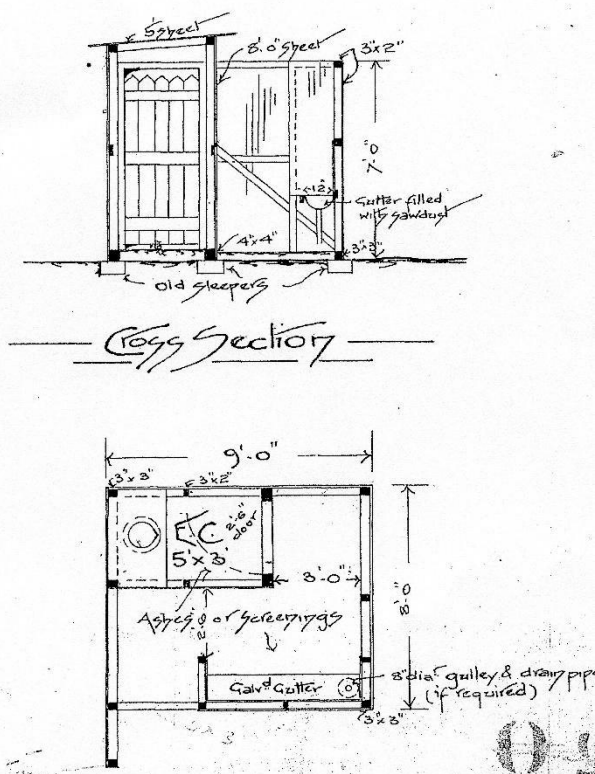
If there was ever an expression of low-cost it was the toilet at Wondabyne. On 13th November 1907 a plan was prepared for the provision of a very small male toilet measuring 9 feet by 8 feet with a two-person, galvanised iron urinal situated approximately 3 feet off the floor. The toilet was located off the southern end of the southbound platform. There was a single earth closet measuring 5 feet by 3 feet. Not only was economy reflected by the overall small size but by the provision of a roof only over closet and the provision of "ashes or screenings" for the floor material.

*The structure was timber framed with the walls clad with corrugated iron sheets. The floor was a composition of ashes and screenings. The roof extended only over the closet, which measured the traditional dimensions for men of five feet by three feet.*

A bucket of dirt and a spade was placed inside the closet and the dirt was shovelled into the pit under the toilet seat after the essential business had been completed. Hence the name of the type of toilet as an earth closet. The urinal was formed of a galvanised iron trough, which was positioned approximately three feet above the floor level. Usually, the drain at the end of the urinal would be connected to what was known as an absorption trench but, in the case of

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[10] Email from Graham Harper on 20th May 2023.

Wondabyne, the New South Wales Railways thought even that aspect could be eliminated and penned the words "if required" on the plan. Given that the urinal would only handle two men at a time, further savings could have been made by reducing the diameter of the gully and drainpipe from a whopping eight inches.

It would appear that the toilet was not the only existing, departmental facility that was shared by members of the public. It would seem that the two platforms that had been erected to facilitate the transfer of staves between the signalman and the locomotive crew were subsequently utilised to serve also as passenger platforms. The former main line became the Down Main and the former loop became the Up Main. The evidence of this assertion is a reference in *Weekly Notice No. 51* of 1910 which states that "a small passenger platform at Wondabyne will be dealt with under platform conditions".
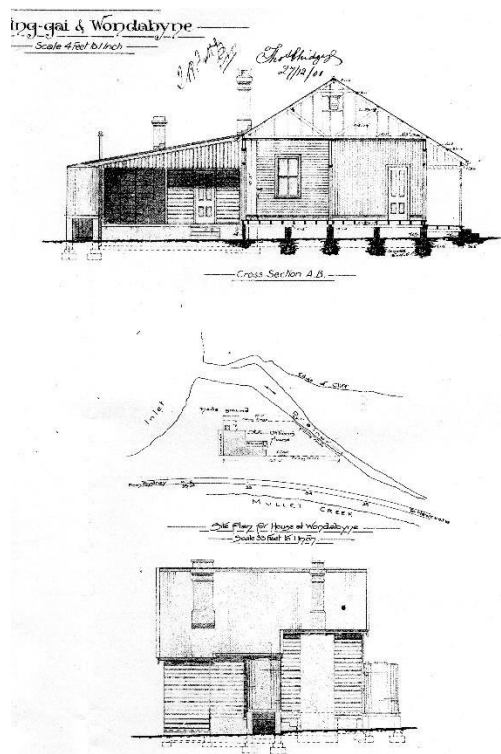
The timber signalman's house was a typical design which accorded to the standard J1 design. Tenders closed on 7th December 1901 for the Station Officers' houses at both Wondabyne and Mount Ku-ring-gai.[11] The contractor signed the plan on 27th December 1901. The Wondabyne residence was located on the western side of the line near the northern end of the then existing single line platform.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE RAILWAY FACILITIES IN 1906

An article appeared in various newspapers about the isolated location of the station. It was headed "The St. Helena of the N.S.W. Railways". St Helena is an island in the South Atlantic Ocean approximately 1,200 miles off the coast of South Africa and the reference to St Helena by the writer of the article emphasised the isolation of

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[11] *Government Gazette of NSW*, 3rd December 1901, No. 1016, p. 9349.

Wondabyne station. St Helena Island was the place where Napoleon Bonaparte was placed into exile (for a second time) and where he died. The article stated:

> "Wondabyne railway station is situated about five miles north of Brooklyn, and comprises a platform and office, and a fine weatherboard cottage, the residence of the station master, Mr. Jas. Learmonth, who, with his wife and daughter (a girl of 14 years) are the sole human inhabitants of the place. The station is bounded on one side by a frowning range of rugged hills, and on the other by the waters of Mullet Creek. There is no road to the place, and consequently no vehicular or pedestrian traffic, and no passenger train stopping there, and the only time a train stops is when two stock trains happen to be crossing there. I have been assured by Mr. Learmonth (writes our Brooklyn correspondent) that it is now nearly 12 months since his wife has had a chance of conversing with one of her own sex. It seems scarcely credible that such solitude can exist within a few miles of our busy centres of population, and on a main line of railway at that".[12]
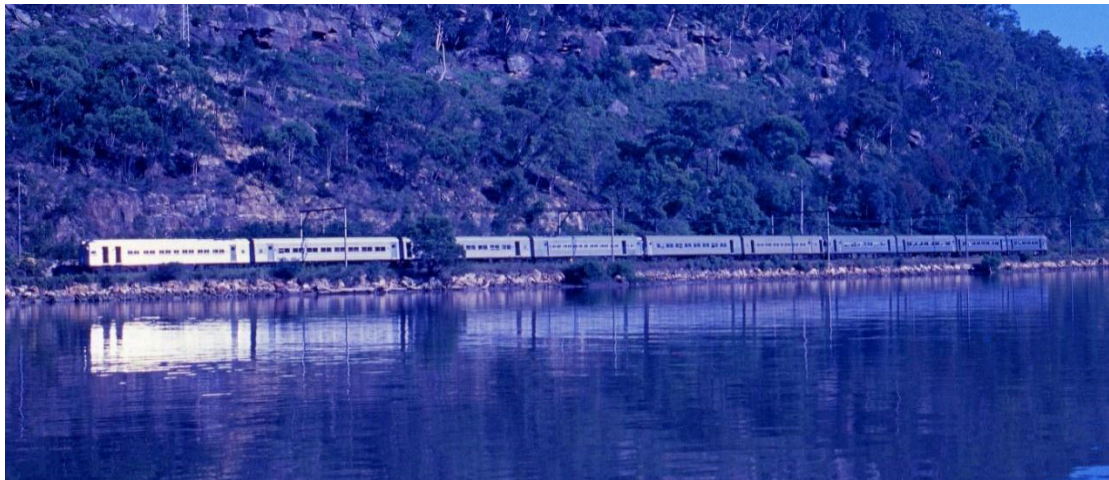

*A ten-car single-deck interurban train with four-car U set leading a companion six-car set sprints along scenic Mullet Creek with No. 185 service to Gosford. A tale that went viral throughout the Trading and Catering Branch of the railway involved a young TCS girl asking the conductor on the Newcastle Flyer what the fences were in the water along Mullet Creek. He explained that they were oyster leases and as the oysters were wild the fences were in place to stop them from escaping! **SOURCE:** Neil Munro 12th March 1978.*

1911 - TRACK DUPLICATION

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[12] *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 18th August 1906, p. 4.
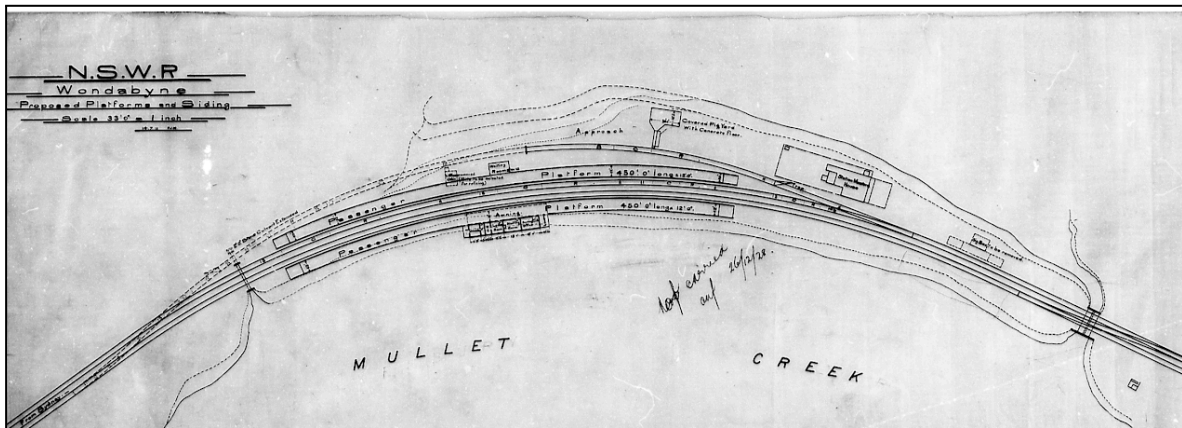
Two plans were prepared for the new station in connection with track duplication. The first one was issued on 14th July 1911 which involved the provision of two side platforms on a curved section of line. On the southbound platform a four room building was to be erected approximately 60 feet in length while, on the northbound platform, a one room waiting shed was to be provided. Both platforms were to be 450 feet long.
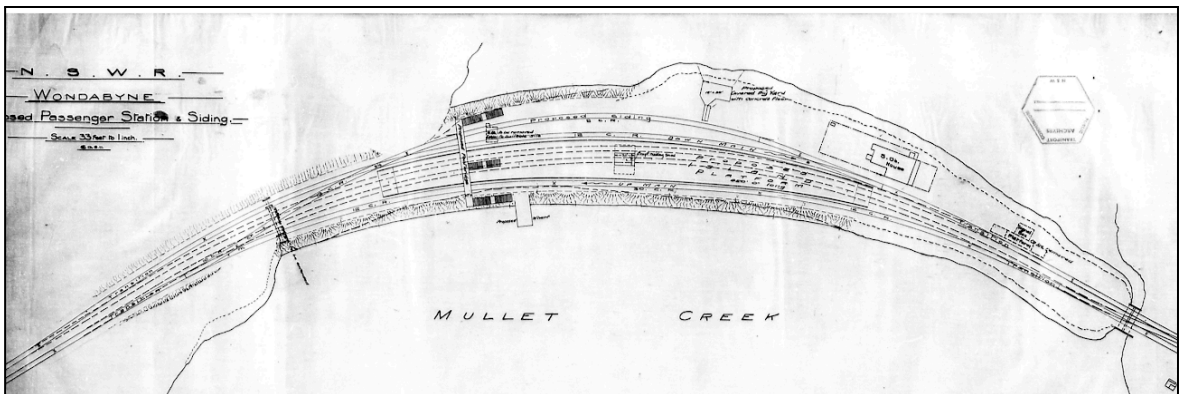
Two months later, there was a rethink of the situation and, instead of two side platforms and a moderate-sized building on one of them, a second plan, which was prepared on 12th September 1911, provided for the for the erection of a 450 feet long island platform with only a 20 foot long waiting shed. A footbridge was proposed to serve the island platform with stepways to both sides of the line. At the time, the 1901 built timber cottage for the signalman was located partly adjacent to the proposed island platform. The existing, single sided platform and signal box located to the north of the proposed island platform were to be demolished.

While track duplication went ahead, the only change to the station accommodation was the addition of a new side platform opposite the existing site platform. Both existing and second platforms were timber framed with sleepers for decks. The signal box remained in use until 1922 as a block station, thereby increasing line capacity. The evidence suggests that the signal box was retained as a waiting shed at the site of the former signal box and then relocated to the present site in 1939

after which it was used again for the next 40 years as a waiting shed on the northbound platform. There was no shelter on the southbound platform.[13]

1918 - A NEW USE FOR AN OLD SIGNAL BOX – OR WAS IT?

Singleton writes:

> "In December 1918, Wondabyne became an unattended passenger platform and, when the signal box was put out of use, it became the waiting shed on the short staff platform. A new timber up platform was provided. The platforms remained in use until the 3rd April 1939 when, at the request of the local quarry proprietors, they were closed, to be replaced by platforms at the quarry site, 30 chains to the north, and the name Wondabyne was transferred to this new site".[14]

The only problem is that John Forsyth has written that the signal box did not close until 1922. That's another issue that needs clarification.[15] A photograph of the timber southbound platform appeared in *The Staff* on 27th April 1927 [page 243]. There was no building on the platform.

THE 1939 – THE FINAL STATION RELOCATION TO THE PRESENT SITE

In conjunction with the relocation of the station to mileage 40 miles and 38 ½ chains (65.14 kilometres), the Way and Works Branch issued a plan on 18th January 1939 for the arrangements at the new site. The former signal box at the previous location was relocated to the northbound platform as a waiting shed but there was no building on the southbound platform.

The Department initially intended to relocate the male toilet that had been located at the previous site to a location off the southern end of the southbound platform. There was a subsequent change of mind and the toilet was relocated to the rear of the northbound platform. From 1939, the station was located adjacent to the quarry site. The Hawkesbury Sandstone Company did erect the sandstone platform wall for the 50 feet long (by 8 feet wide) northbound platform. The timber platform serving the previous southbound platform was refixed.

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[13] See photographs in R. T. Taaffe, *Signal Boxes of New South Wales Railways and Tramways*, Vol. 4, pp. 60 and 61.
[14] Singleton, op. cit., p. 194.
[15] J. H. Forsyth, *Historical Notes on Main Northern Railway*, Second Ed., State Rail Authority, 1999, pp. 26 & 27.

This photograph taken in 1928 shows the deck of both platforms covered with old sleepers. The 1909 signal box is on the northbound platform with nothing on the southbound platform. Where is the box for parcels? At that time, it was located adjacent to signal box and is just visible in the photograph.   Two-rail, white painted fencing protects the rear of both platforms.
SOURCE: *Photograph No842121, ARHS Railway Archives.*

THE 1940s – A WAITING SHED FOR SOUTHBOUND PASSENGERS

During World War Two, the Railway Department had time to issue a sketch on 21st September 1943 for the provision of a waiting shed measuring 10 feet by 7 feet to be located off the southern end of the southbound platform. It had a skillion roof. The southbound platform was 108 feet long at that time. The former signal box continued to be utilised as a waiting shed on the northbound platform, which somehow had grown from the intended 50 feet in 1939 to 54 feet long in 1943. A colour photograph of the small waiting shed off the end of the southbound platform, taken in 1958, shows the 1943 structure painted in the officially named mid-stone colour.
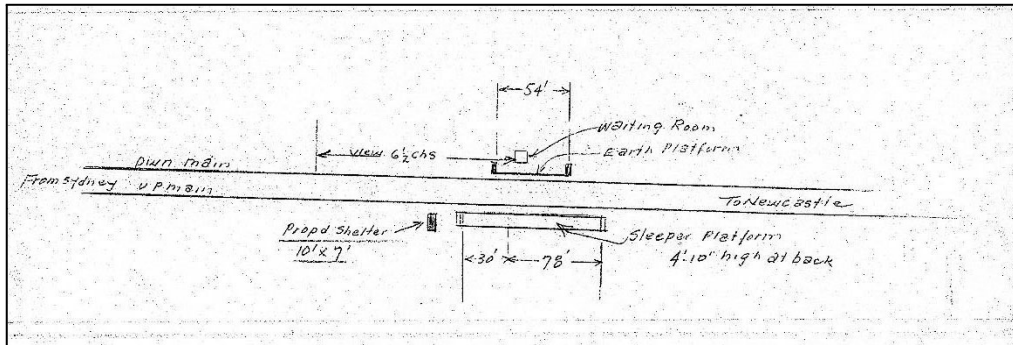
The above sketch of the 1943 waiting shed is the closest document in the history of Wondabyne station to a plan for any station structure. It shows the 1909 signal box converted to a waiting shed on the northbound platform. Because of the total absence of land behind the southbound platform, the Department of Railways had no choice but to erect the shelter off the southern end of the southbound platform.

THE 1950s – PROPOSED PLATFORM EXTENSIONS

The Chief Civil Engineer, Norm Vogan, approved on 6th November 1957 a plan to extend both side platforms at Wondabyne to 600 feet by utilising extensions at both ends. At that time, the timber waiting shed serving the 50 foot long northbound platform while the 1943 built similar facility off the southern end of the 100 foot long southbound platform remained in existence.[16] The platform extensions did not proceed.

THE 1960s – THE NEW PARCELS BOX

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[16] Photograph No. 884141, dated 271st August 1958, ARHS Railway Archives shows the off platform waiting shed.

This 1985 photograph shows the 1943 waiting shed off the end of the southbound platform and the parcels box dating from the 1960s. The Department of Railways issued a standard plan in 1963 for a parcels box and 20 examples are known to have existed in parts of the rail network in rural and regional areas. **SOURCE:** *Photograph No. 002796E, ARHS Railway Archives.*

The above photograph was taken on 27th March 1982 and shows the parcels box and off-platform waiting shed on the southbound side. **SOURCE:** *Photograph No. 260550, ARHS Railway Archives.*

The District Engineer at Newcastle issued a plan on 27th June 1964 to allow the shortening of the southbound timber platform from 100 feet to 50 feet at the northern end. The timber waiting shed 10 feet by 7 feet off the southern end of the southbound platform continued to provide shelter. The northbound platform featured the sandstone wall which had been built in 1939.

1980-1985 - STATION UPGRADE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 1984 EXTENSION OF ELECTRIFICATION TO NEWCASTLE

The parcels box continued to survive on the southbound platform throughout the 1980s.[17] These had been introduced from the 1960s and existed at a number of small rural stations including Geurie, Gungal and Gunebang and the one at Wondabyne probably dated from the 1960 track electrification. The example at Wondabyne was the geographically closest example to Sydney. The waiting shed at the southern end of the southbound platform also existed in the 1980s.

This photograph shows the Canberra style bus shelter, which was delivered to the site by a rail-mounted crane. The SRA had placed the first precast, semi-circular bus shelter at Aberdeen in 1980. The concrete shelters were bulky-looking, hints of a link to the Brutalist school of design. They reflected the belief of State Rail Authority engineers that concrete was the preferred construction medium to resist vandalism. The Authority placed the bus shelters at 15 locations, with some stations having a shelter on each side platform. All but two were located on the Main North or North Coast between Telarah and Dungog, exclusive and all were erected between 1980 and 1985. **SOURCE:** *Photograph No. 002796D, ARHS Railway Archives.*

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[17] Photograph No. 260548, dated 27th March 1982, ARHS Railway Archives.

Electrification between Wyong and Newcastle took place in the middle of 1984 and a number of changes were made to stations on the Short North for the new electric service. At Wondabyne, the Newcastle Division Engineer approved on 5th October 1983 the location of a pre-cast, circular, concrete bus waiting shed at the rear of the northbound platform.[18] The use of concrete structures was often utilised in the 1980s as a means of combatting rampant vandalism. The structure was painted white with blue fibreglass side panels that surrounded the circular-shaped windows. It was craned from a rail wagon on to the ground in the same month.[19] Both the concrete bus shelter on the northbound platform and the waiting shed off the south end of the southbound platform were either demolished about 1990 or some time earlier.[20]

1986 THE INTERNATIONAL SCULPTURE SYMPOSIUM MOVEMENT

From 1959, international sculpture symposia have been held in numerous towns and cities around the world, including Lindabrunn in Austria and Hagi in Japan. One website provides the following details:

> "The first Sculpture Symposium in Australia was held at Wondabyne near Gosford in New South Wales in 1986. Wondabyne is well known for its history of stone quarrying. The Wondabyne rail stop was named after Mount Wondabyne, located adjacent to the station across the bay, known as Mullet River or Mullet Creek. It was originally built in 1889 for quarry use only and is known as Mullet Creek Station. It was later renamed Hawkesbury Cabin station, then finally Wondabyne. The stone for the Wondabyne Sculptures was sourced from the Wondabyne Quarry which is now owned by Gosford Quarries.
>
> The Wondabyne Sculpture Symposium held in 1986 featured sandstone sculptures by Bruce Copping and 11 other sculptors from six different nations. The sculpture symposium was undertaken along the foreshore area near the railway stop at Wondabyne. However, eight years later the local council decided that it was in the best interest of public to relocate these impressive sculptures due to access and liability issues at the original Wondabyne site. It was then decided that the more desirable and accessible site was the New Mount Penang Parklands".[21]

The sculptures were relocated to Mount Penang in 2004.

THE 1990s - THE IMPACT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CITYRAIL

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[18] Photograph No. 027967a, dated 198,5 ARHS Railway Archives.
[19] *Railway Digest*, November 1983, p. 353.
[20] A photograph in *Byways of Steam 14*, p. 48 shows the signal box in existence in 1959.
[21] https://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC17G5P.

After the establishment of CityRail in 1989, the new organisation set about improving every station on its network. Even Wondabyne, despite its puny size, received a makeover which involved, by 1994, new red and white seats adorned both platforms with the then usual white coloured steel pool fencing at the rear of the platforms. A new-style station nameboard, with a red-painted support post, was erected only on the northbound platform.[22] The concrete bus shelter on the northbound platform was removed with the erection of transparent shelters.

CityRail's last improvement at Wondabyne was the installation of CCTV installed in 2000.

CityRail had set up a number of sectors within the Sydney, Newcastle, Lithgow, Wollongong and Moss Vale areas. The Line General Manager who managed Wondabyne station was John Zantiotis and he was a very capable and enthusiastic ambassador for the improvement of every railway station in his region. It did not take too long for John to ensure that Wondabyne received its fair share of red paint, red platform seats and white coloured curved-top steel fencing. The red and white colours marked what could be described as the first period of CityRail, which covered the years from 1989 to 1999. The second period of CityRail commenced in 2000 and ended in 2013 with the demise of CityRail. That second time period was reflected in the abandonment of red paint and the introduction of dark blue coloured seats with station names in white letters on the backs of the seats. The above photograph dates from the early 1990s. **SOURCE:** *Photograph No. 231399 ARHS Railway Archives.*

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[22] See Photograph Nos. 278061 & 278062 dated 12th September 1994, ARHS Railway Archives.

This photograph shows the changes introduced in year 2000 by CityRail. The bus shelter and the red paint have gone and a new shelter with a blue seat and white writing has appeared. In 1988, the State Rail Authority consulted widely on the best contrast of colours to easily identify station names and other information. White lettering against a blue background was claimed to provide the best outcome. Hence, the dark blue seat with white name under the shelter. **SOURCE:** *Wikimedia Commons via Google.*

The one element that was missing from the station improvements by the State Rail Authority in the 1980s was the absence of consistency of design and structures across all stations. This was rectified by CityRail from 1989 with the issue of a uniform station design guide resulting in a strong visual concord in relation to simple structures such as shelters. **SOURCE**: *Wikipedia via Google.*

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The then Chief Executive of the State Rail Authority, Simon Lane, issued a pamphlet in March 2000 entitled 'A new look for CityRail stations'. He wrote that "stations are facing a facelift – new colour scheme – new way finding signs – which features blue, green and neutral tones – red lamp posts and bins are returning to silver galvanised finish – red platform seats are being repainted dark blue with the station name in white". The image was taken on 13th April 2018. **SOURCE:** *News Section, Wondabyne Wandering ARHS Website.*

SYDNEY TRAINS – NEW STATION NAMEBOARDS AND SEATS

Just to let waiting passengers know who operated trains through the station, Sydney Trains removed the blue and white signage and blue platform seats and replaced them with the orange and white station nameboards and new platform seats with fake wood grain finish.

IS SANDSTONE STILL REMOVED FROM THE QUARRY?

The Wondabyne sandstone siding was decommissioned in early 2009.[23] Does sandstone continue to be quarried? How? Local train observers, Geoff Allerton and Neil Munro, combine to provide the following answer:

> "The quarry continued for some years to receive bogie open wagons in their siding for direct rail loading. In time, the cost of private sidings became prohibitive and the quarry became dormant. The quarry has in recent years reopened and transfers stone blocks to the Up side of the line during periods of track closure. They use a large rubber tyred front end loader to move stone across the line to where a barge picks them up for transfer to an unknown riverside location, possible Brooklyn or Kangaroo Point, after which it is taken on by lorry. The front end loader was parked in the quarry or often left on the

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[23] *The Railway News*, May, 2009, p. 114.

Creek side area, previously the site of the stone carvings, which were later moved to Kariong above West Gosford".[24]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Six-car double-deck interurban set V68 carefully approaches Wondabyne down the 1 in 40 grade with N240 service to Sydney on 28th April 1997. If a passenger has requested a stop at Wondabyne, which the guard conveys to the driver, or if the driver spots a person on the platform signalling intention to join the train, the service will stop with only the rear passenger door and guards' compartment in the rear car at the very short platform. The high-sided cutting at the rear of this train was the site of the intended No. 7 tunnel at the time of construction of the line at this location. The quantity surveyors underestimated the amount of fill required on the high embankments to achieve a 1 in 40 gradient up to the Woy Woy tunnel. Consequently, the tunnel site was opened out into a quite deep cutting and the material removed added on top of the embankments. The curved embankment over the headwaters of Mullet Creek proved over time to have stability problems and present-day signage along this section of the line confirms it is still watched carefully. C.C. Singleton, in

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[24] Conversation with Geoff Allerton on 2nd October 2024 and email from Neil Munro on 3rd October 2024.

his serialized articles on the Short North in the ARHS Bulletin of 1965 mentions "…when surveys were made for duplication, 20 years after the original construction of the single line, it was found that the large embankment crossing the head of Mullet Creek had sunk in the middle to such an extent that, after lifting the track nine feet, the best grade that could be obtained was 1 in 39, whereas the original grade had been 1 in 40! Small wonder that many an expert driver had his copybook blotted by Wondabyne Bank." **SOURCE:** *Neil Munro is to be thanked for taking the photograph.*

Stuart Sharp

12th November 2024