

A RAILWAY STATION IN A HERITAGE-MINDED AREA – GORDON

STUART SHARP



The photograph shows the Park Road brick overbridge which is a little to the north of the station.¹ Evan Rees, rollingstock historian writes: “The train is proceeding from Hornsby to Milsons Point. There is not much remarkable about the carriages in this photograph. A 30 class tank locomotive is hauling a fairly typical consist of a six-car set of American suburban cars with an earlier clerestory-roof suburban car at the rear building up the set to meet demand. At the time of this shot, the cars are all still gas lit evidenced by the Anderson ventilators along the letterboard sides of each car”.²

The overbridge was completed in 1909 in conjunction with the track duplication. It replaced a timber bridge which had been built at the opening of the line in 1890. The plan was prepared

¹ Dr John Bradfield lived at 43 Park Road, Gordon. He is buried not far away in the cemetery of St. John’s Church of England in Gordon.

² Email from Evan Rees on 10th December 2024.

by one the Railway Draftsmen, T. E. Moorhouse, on 10th July 1909. It was 74 feet long and 30 feet 6 inches wide, including a six feet wide footpath. Bullnosed bricks were featured on the top of the brick balustrades. The deck of the bridge was supported by eight longitudinal metal arches known as jack arches in conjunction with the brick abutments and two steel trestles – a technique that was often used in the 1920s. Since construction, the centre sections of both balustrades have been raised tastefully a further five courses, possibly in an attempt to mitigate the local ruffians throwing items onto the tracks.

Safeworking historian, Graham Harper, adds the following details expressed in the photograph: “The photograph shows an up passenger service approaching the Gordon Up Home signal. The road is set for the Up platform road (i.e., island platform No. 2). The arm on the other side of the bracket is for moves into Terminal Road. This latter move would have been a rare one, as Up trains rarely terminated at Gordon.

The shunt signal arm beneath the home signal is not a kind of call-on for entry to the Terminal Road but, when cleared, it allows the engine off a terminator from Milsons Point, having cut off from its train and shunted out into the Pymble block section, to pass the home signal and run through the station and set back onto its train. The arrangement was cumbersome, but it survived until the introduction of automatic signalling in 1928. The exchange of block bell signals to do this movement would be interesting to hear. Gordon must have been a busy place at times – the Down starter has been cleared as well for the passage of a train to Hornsby.³ **SOURCE OF PHOTOGRAPH:** Google.



This 1909 photograph shows construction of the Park Road overbridge. The photographer is looking south towards the station. The replacement of the 1888 platform building is yet to take place. The jack arches will be inserted between the longitudinal steam beams. **SOURCE:** Ku-ring-gai Council Library. <https://www.krg.nsw.gov.au/Community/Ku-ring-gai-Library/Local-History/Local-History-photo-galleries/Scenes-from-Gordon-and-Killara>.

³ Email from Graham Harper on 12th December 2024.



This photograph looks north to the Park Street overbridge from Gordon station. The two rail timber fence at the rear of platform No. 1 is visible on the left side.
SOURCE: C.C. Singleton, "The North Shore Line", ARHS Bulletin, July 1959, p. 105.

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SAFeworking AT GORDON BY GRAHAM HARPER



The first platform building at Gordon contained three rooms plus toilets. It accorded with a standard design introduced in 1880 by John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief for Railway Construction. It was a compressed version of his three room model. The above picture shows another example of the same mini three room design - at Thornleigh, which was approved for construction in 1886. All but three examples of this compressed type were erected in rural regions. Only those at Thornleigh, Gordon and Chatswood were constructed within the present boundaries of the Sydney metropolitan areas and, at the time they were built, those parts of Sydney were similarly very much rural. The 1977 picture of Thornleigh shows the same layout of spaces as at Gordon with the open-fronted waiting room in the centre, which was flanked on the farther side by the ticket office and, on the side closer to the camera, by the ladies' waiting room. Women proceeded through a secret passage, concealed by the shed in the picture, to the rear of the toilet pavilion. Male toilet facilities were contained in the front half of the pavilion and their space is identified by the green-painted, dwarf brick wall facing the platform, which formed the rear wall of the urinal.

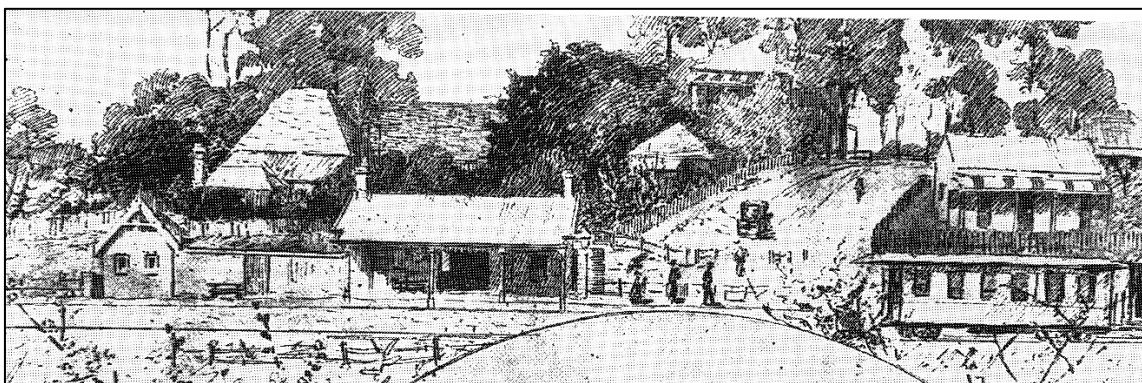
PART 1

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE NORTH SHORE RAILWAY AND GORDON STATION WERE APPROVED AND BUILT

Appendix 1 sets out the turmoil of the time in which Parliament authorised construction of the line. There was a period of ten years (1883-1893) between the announcement that the line was included in the list of proposed new lines and the opening of the line at Milsons Point.

Why the delay? It was tough sell to convince Parliamentarians to support the line in part because of the high cost per mile due to the heavy earthworks. After all, there was no residential development at the junction at Hornsby and none at the 1890 terminus. There was no agreement on the location where the line should cease on Sydney Harbour partly because there was no agreement on the line's purpose, apart from accelerating the subdivision of lands held by several high-profile politicians.

Construction of the line at least provided relief work for unemployed men. The author of the relationship between urban railways and political misbehaviour in the 19th century, Lesley Muir, wrote that between 200 and 300 men were working at Gordon in late 1887.⁴ The Railway Department in 1887 suffered a decline in revenue for general merchandise and livestock and the budget would have suffered a loss had it not been for large amount of wool traffic.⁵ This was against a colonial debt which Muir noted had mounted to “frightening proportions”.⁶



The above sketch appeared in the Sydney Mail newspaper on 20th October 1894 (page 806). It is a fairly good representation of what existed, except the shed between the main building

⁴ L. Muir, *Shady Acres*, Ultimo, Halstead Press, 2016, p. 238.

⁵ Railway Commissioner, *Annual Report for 1887*, Sydney, Government Printer, 1888, p. 13.

⁶ Muir, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

and the toilet pavilion is exaggerated in length. It should have been half the length shown. The Station Master's cottage is correctly expressed on the hill on the righthand side.

PART 2 – THE SINGLE LINE & SINGLE PLATFORM

AUTHORISATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BRANCH LINE

On the 24th September 1883, Colonial Secretary, George Dibbs, acting also as Minister for Public Works, released the long-awaited railway policy for public scrutiny, which included three main line extensions, 11 branch lines (including the North Shore), two isolated railways and five light railways and a city extension to Fort Denison i.e., Circular Quay. Typical of the absence of financial rigour of the time, the profits on these lines were calculated without payment of interest on the loans.⁷

Tenders closed on 7th June 1887 “for the construction of a Railway from Hornsby, Pearce's Corner, on the Southern and Northern Junction Railway, to St. Leonards, being a length of nearly eleven (11) miles”.⁸ Mr E. Pritchard was awarded the contract on 1st July 1887.

TURNING THE FIRST SOD

The ceremony of turning the first sod for the construction of a line of railway from “St. Leonards to Pearce's Corner” (i.e. Wahroonga – not Hornsby) was performed on 10th August 1887 by Miss Annie Thomasine Parkes, daughter of Sir Henry Parkes, in the presence of about 500 people.⁹ Parkes had a strong electoral interest in the project as he was the Member for St. Leonards between January 1887 and October 1891 as well as being Premier for that period. She got to keep a beautifully decorated spade which is now in the collection of the State Library.

LINE OPENING

The 10 mile 32 chain single line between Hornsby and St Leonards was opened on 1st January 1890. The line was extended as double track between St Leonards and Milson's Point and opened on 1st May 1893.

⁷ Michael Hogan et al, *The People's Choice*, Leichhardt, The Federation Press, 2007, pp. 253 & 254.

⁸ *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 3rd June 1887, No.319, p. 3693.

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11th August 1887, p. 4.



*This photograph was taken between 1900 and 1909 and shows the 1888-approved building. The platform wall shows one of the classic hallmarks of John Whitton's design policy. The wall slopes gently but consistently towards the toe unlike platforms erected after 1890 where the coping is square to the vertical wall, rather than sloping. On the extreme righthand side can be seen the white-painted posts and gate for entry to the goods yard. **SOURCE:** Google.*

STATIONS AND THEIR PLATFORM BUILDINGS UPON THE OPENING OF THE NORTH SHORE BRANCH LINE IN 1890

Appendix 2 to these notes sets out information about the design of buildings at each station on the opening date of 1st January 1890. Planning was underway before Chief Commissioner Eddy commenced duty on 22nd October 1888 for the provision of buildings for the North Shore branch line but was not finalised for all stations. The structures at Wahroonga and St. Leonards display characteristics contrary to Whitton's design policy. Hence, their design was completed after Whitton's departure in 1889.

There were eight stations on the branch line of which seven were erected in timber and one in brick, namely the terminus at St. Leonards. Five designs were used for the six stations about which the designs are known. These were:

- St. Leonards – the largest building – the standard roadside design, as modified after John Whitton's departure
- Chatswood and Gordon – mini three room examples of Whitton's standard roadside design
- Turramurra – a three room structure with gabled roof but without a platform awning – to a design introduced by Whitton in 1885
- Lindfield – a small waiting shed of Whitton's design (with roof sloping to the rear)
- Wahroonga - a small waiting shed to a design introduced after Whitton's departure (with roof sloping towards the platform coping)

In addition, an existing house was modified for use at Pymble. No building was erected initially at Roseville, as far as is known.

The delivery of so many different building designs and station solutions at the time of the line opening was unusual. Normally, one or two designs would be applied to a new section of track. Thus, the North Shore branch line represented very much a transition from the leadership of John Whitton to that of his successor, Henry Deane, whom the Government appointed to the position of Acting Engineer-in-Chief for Railways from 1st June 1889 during the absence on pre-retirement leave of John Whitton.¹⁰

Why were the platform buildings on the North Shore line so crappy? Few suburban railway lines were built in the 19th century and, therefore, it is nearly impossible to make a comparison. Luckily, the line to Hurstville opened in 1884 as the first stage in a trunk route down the South Coast.

THE COMPARISON BETWEEN BUILDINGS ON THE REDFERN-HURSTVILLE LINE IN 1884 AND THE NORTH SHORE LINE IN 1890



In this photograph, the station officer is running along the platform to hand the staff to the locomotive driver. The three-rail fencing at the rear of the platform was representative of most stations on new lines in the 1880s and largely replaced the use of pickets because of the lower initial cost. In the 19th century, the Railways minimised the number of platform seats. In this photograph, there are only two seats. There was one seat under the platform awning but no seats south of the building. Usually, platforms were widened from 12 to 15 feet in front of the buildings but this was not done at Gordon. That omission was consistent with other stations having mini three room buildings and no doubt related to the need to minimise expenditure.

SOURCE: nsw.gov.au/Community/Ku-ring-gai-Library/Local-History/Local-History-photo-galleries/Scenes-from-Gordon-and-Killara

¹⁰ New South Wales Government Gazette, 14th June 1889, No.311, p. 4164.

Although both the Illawarra line opened in 1884 to Hurstville and the North Shore line opened in 1890 were part suburban in intent, the platform buildings on both lines were poles apart in terms of materials, size and ornamentation levels. On the line to Hurstville, there were three First Class and four Second Class buildings. Of the eight stations on the North Shore line, there was only one Third Class building, at the terminus at St Leonards. All structures, other than St. Leonards, were small and insignificant. While the Illawarra line buildings exuded a message of confidence for prospective suburban land purchases, those on the North Shore line conveyed the opposite message.

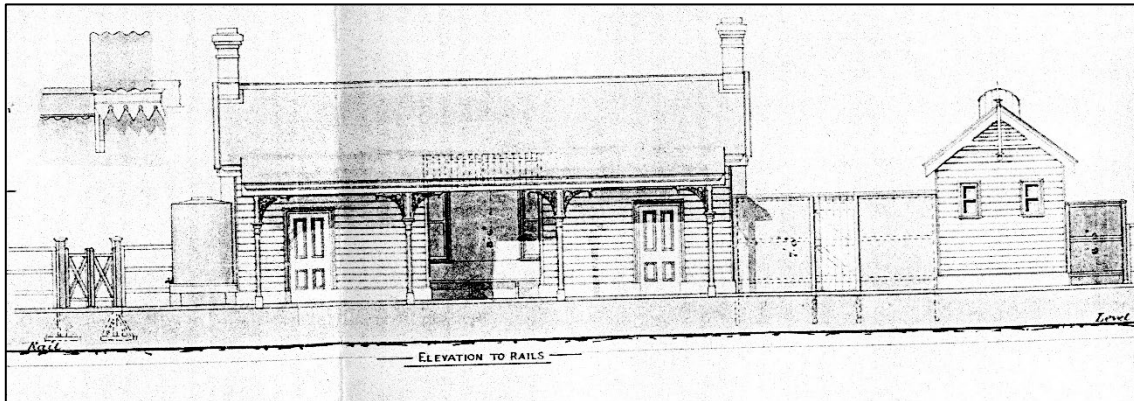
How come? The difference between the Illawarra and the North Shore lines is explained entirely by the ability and otherwise of the New South Wales Government to obtain high levels of capital on the London money market. The year in which the line reached Hurstville, i.e. in 1884, was the absolute boom year in terms of the desire and the reality of obtaining extremely large amounts of overseas fund for railway construction. The change in the speed of railway construction is reflected in the number of miles open each year from 1880 to 1894, shown in Appendix 3. In 1884, 169 miles were opened whereas the only line opened in 1890 was that from Hornsby to St Leonards – 10 and a bit miles. The use of an existing dwelling as a ticket office at Pymble and the utilisation of a small, combined house/office for the Resident Engineer at Gordon as the residence of the Station Master were indicative of the funding crisis.

It was in 1885 when the dealers in the London money market started to realise the possibility that the New South Wales Government was possibly borrowing too much money and, therefore, may not be able to repay the debt. Appendix 4 shows the annual expenditure on railways and the size of the New South Wales public debt. In 1884, the Public Works Loan Act authorised the expenditure on railways of over £13 million. In 1890, the authorised allocation for Railways was just over £1.5 million. Whereas the public debt in 1884 was £30 million, in 1890 it had grown to £48 million – an increase of 60%. The colonial financial crisis in the early 1890s continued when the line was extended from St Leonards to Milson's Point. All stations on the line for that small extension were of timber construction and atypical designs.

It was in 1880 that John Whitton introduced a suite of three standard designs for platform buildings on new lines. Later, the suite became known as standard roadside buildings. In the suite were:

- a three room short version of roughly 35-37 feet with one small toilet pavilion (herein called a mini-three room building)
- a three room version measuring about 55 feet long with one or two attached/semi-attached pavilions, &
- a five room structure with two attached/semi-attached pavilions over 70 feet in length

The smallest of the three sizes comprised a main building like the example at Gordon 35 feet long and 13 feet wide (internal) and a semi-detached pavilion containing male and female toilets. Some examples were erected in timber and others in brick. Gordon station received a timber, mini-three room version. Ornamentation was minimal and not all examples were provided with features such as cast iron brackets above the capitals on the timber posts supporting the platform awning. The most basic of ornamentation, namely finials on the gables, was omitted. Fireplaces and doors on the entrance to the general waiting room were not universal to all examples.



Above is part of the 1888 plan for the building at Gordon. One characteristic that identified the affair as low cost was the installation of an above ground rainwater tank. Interestingly, the shape and location of the tank were inconsistent with the structure as built.¹¹ In the longer versions of the standard roadside design, such tanks were placed underground. In addition to its small size, another characteristic that mirrored limited money was the absence of paired doors and accompanying side windows on the front of the general waiting room, which was also void of heating. Balancing those budget measures was the presence of an overall roof on the toilet pavilion. In the majority of instances, a roof was added only to the closets in the mini three room examples – not the whole pavilion.

THE IMPACT OF INITIAL OPERATIONS AFTER THE OPENING OF THE NORTH SHORE LINE

In regard to the North Shore line generally, the use of timber buildings, the selection of designs that were utilitarian and not decorative and the delay between the issue of plans and construction pointed to a shortage of capital funds. It was not only capital funds that were in short supply. Although the 1890s Depression was underway, revenue from freight and passenger traffic was generally increasing up to 1893, with one significant exception – the North Shore line. The Commissioners made the following comment in their 1889-90 *Annual Report*.

¹¹ The plan shows a round tank at the southern end whereas the tank, as built, was square in shape and positioned at the northern end.

“Since the date of our last report, the only additional line opened for traffic has been that from St. Leonards to Hornsby but, in consequence of the position of the terminus, it has been an absolute loss to the country. The working from the 1st January to the 30th June (1890) show a total earning of £886 only, while the cost of the line for working (expenses) and interest amounts to £6,849. Little improvement can be expected until the line is brought to the waters of Port Jackson and, when this has been done, an opportunity will be afforded of creating a good suburban traffic, so that in a few years in all probability the expenditure on the whole scheme will cease to be a burden upon the existing lines”.¹²

It was with those remarks in mind that the Commissioners, in order to limit operating daily expenses, removed all staff from Gordon station just one month after the opening on 4th February 1890 in conjunction with the cancellation of the safeworking system between Gordon and Chatswood. Staff were re-instated on 20th July 1893. Signalling and safeworking historian, Graham Harper, comments that there are conflicting dates about these changes between the official records and well-known secondary commentators. Harper has checked the official records which disclose the following changes:

8 th May 1890	Temporary staff station (meaning safeworking, not employees) at Pymble (SOURCE: Circular No. A113 and <i>Monthly Notice No. 6</i> – 1890)
17 th May 1890	Gordon closed as an Ordinary Train Staff station with the new section from Hornsby to Chatswood (SOURCE: <i>Weekly Notice No. 11-1890</i>)
1 st July 1893	Pymble closed and Gordon re-opened as a staff station with the sections Hornsby-Gordon-Chatswood (SOURCE: <i>Weekly Notice No. 28-1893</i>)

Graham Harper adds the following thoughts:

“From the *Weekly Notices*, it would appear that Pymble only lasted nine days as a staff and ticket station before the facility was withdrawn in favour of the single section Chatswood to Hornsby. No proper facilities for crossing trains were ever provided at Pymble. I think the Pymble ‘crossing facility’ was simply an effort to save the wages of the crew at Gordon by adding staff and ticket duties to the Pymble gatekeeper whose crossing was near the station. His position could not be eliminated”.¹³

¹² Railway Commissioners, *Annual Report to 30th June 1890*, Sydney, Government Printer, 1890, p. 5.

¹³ Email from Graham Harper on 27th December 2024.

Read Appendix 5 to these notes for Graham Harper's comprehensive history of railway safeworking at Gordon.

In his search for details of the opening and closing of Gordon as a safeworking station, Harper came across an entry which stated that a "public telephone office" had been established at the station from 4th December 1893.¹⁴ That event would place Gordon

THE INITIAL PLATFORM BUILDINGS AT GORDON

Each time a new line was opened, the Railway Construction Branch of the Department of Public Works prepared an information sheet giving various statistics about the works on the new line. From that information, newspapers prepared articles such as *The Evening News* issue of 1st January, 1890, which stated that the "passenger station was a weatherboard building built on the down side on piles having a verandah to platform front and containing general waiting room 14 feet by 13 feet, a ticket office 11 feet 6 inches by 13 feet and a ladies' room 10 feet by 13 feet with a platform 264 feet by 12 feet."¹⁵ All the measurements, including those for the platform, were pretty much standard for the 1880s for that type of building.



The above photograph taken on 8th February 1978 shows the building at Wollstonecraft after it had been relocated from Gordon in 1909. An additional room has been added to the far end to provide a parcels office. The roof was extended also at the southern end to protect an interlocking frame when it was installed in 1911. The roof extension was subsequently

¹⁴ *Weekly Notice* No. 50-1893.

¹⁵ *The Evening News*, 1st January, 1890, p. 6.

enclosed.¹⁶ *The timber posts supporting the platform awning have been replaced by non-standard brackets cantilevered off timber posts affixed to the building wall.*

The official term “passenger station” gave little information about the design, size and materials of a building. At a station where there were to be two buildings on two platforms, the term signified that it was the superior structure to that on the second platform where that secondary structure was known as a waiting shed. Again, the term gave no hint of design or size. A New South Wales waiting shed could be anything from eight feet by six feet to 90 feet by 20 feet. To be totally confusing, the design of the building proposed for Gordon, which was called a passenger station on the plan was elsewhere known as a waiting shed. In essence, words meant next to nothing to Railway officials and, yes, there was considerable laxity in the supervision of plan preparation.

The Gordon structure belonged to the family which was later known as the standard roadside design. It was a short version of the three room caper and is termed by one commentator as a mini three room standard roadside structure. It was one of 29 such mini three room examples approved between 1880 and 1888. Of the total, the Gordon building was the second last planned with a similar example approved for Chatswood three weeks later.



*The above photograph of Chatswood was taken in 1901 when the 1888 approved timber building, which was the same design as at Gordon, was about to be demolished. The replacement building on the left is nearing completion. It was slightly more ornate than the building at Gordon in 1909 as evident by the location of gablet ventilators on each side of the roof. The awning of the 1888 structure has been removed to allow trains to proceed around the platform, which had been converted from side to island configuration. **SOURCE:** Pinterest.*

Tenders closed on 3rd October 1888 for the construction of the Gordon platform building and the goods shed.¹⁷

¹⁶ R.T. Taaffe, *Signal Boxes of the New South Wales Railway and Tramways*, Vol. 4, Hobart Taaffe Press, 2019, p. 271.

¹⁷ *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 25th September 1888, No.608, p. 6754.

The builder was Alex H. Scouller, who was a well-known railway contractor at the time.¹⁸ He lived at Marrickville, where a street is named after him. He also built the Chatswood, Gordon and Turramurra platform buildings.

Gordon Railway Station was opened on 1st January 1890.

THE GOODS SIDING AND GOODS SHED



The goods shed at Gordon was of the same dimensions and materials as the one shown here at Belmore in 1978. In the above photograph, the deck has been removed from the road elevation. There was one other addition since it opened in 1895. Horizontally set boards have been placed on the external walls each side of the six feet six inch wide pair of sliding doors. The boards were intended to minimise the damage by unthinking staff to the corrugated iron walls. Otherwise, the structure in 1978 retained its 1895 appearance.

A goods siding and goods shed, measuring 36 feet by 16 feet were provided on the western side of the line. The plan was stamped 30th August 1885. The structure was founded on 12 inch diameter timber piles. The eaves of the roof extended over the decks on both sides to facilitate the rail/road transfer of goods. The decks were three feet four inches above the head of the rails. Alex Scouller signed the plan as the contractor on 7th December 1888, which was over three months after he signed the platform building plan. The siding at Gordon held 15 four-wheeled vehicles but the number of vehicles was later reduced to 12.

Railway watcher, Stephen Buck, OAM, points out that the goods shed was relocated in 1909 from the northern end of the goods siding to the southern end upon track

¹⁸ *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 16th October 1888, No.643, p. 7255.

duplication.¹⁹ The goods siding was also extended in 1927 to the location of the traction sub-station to allow the delivery of transformers and other heavy equipment.²⁰

Retired locomotive driver, Bob Gibson, remembers shunting the siding at Gordon in the 1960s. He says the main product that was delivered to Gordon was cut timber from the North Coast. He recalls that a fair bit of the traffic was fence palings.²¹ The goods siding was abolished on 11th April 1976.²² No. 19 points and the associated banner signal were removed from the interlocking frame.²³

C.C. Singleton, in his history of the North Shore line, mentions that that Pittwater Road Siding was opened on 6th September 1927 to serve blue metal bins belonging to Kuring-gai Council. It was located 2,110 feet north of Gordon station. Council received materials for roadmaking and, if that were not bad enough, Council received a favourable rate concession. Singleton adds: "the two sidings over the bins had a single trailing connection with the Up Main line on the Milson's Point side of what is now Mona Vale Road but were removed in 1957".²⁴ Jim Longworth wrote that there existed in 2010 "a large concrete structure" at the site and explained that it was a remnant related to the former siding and bins.²⁵

¹⁹ Email from Stephen Buck on 24th July 2011.

²⁰ SRA, *Gordon Signal Box Open Day 20th April 1997*, no pag.

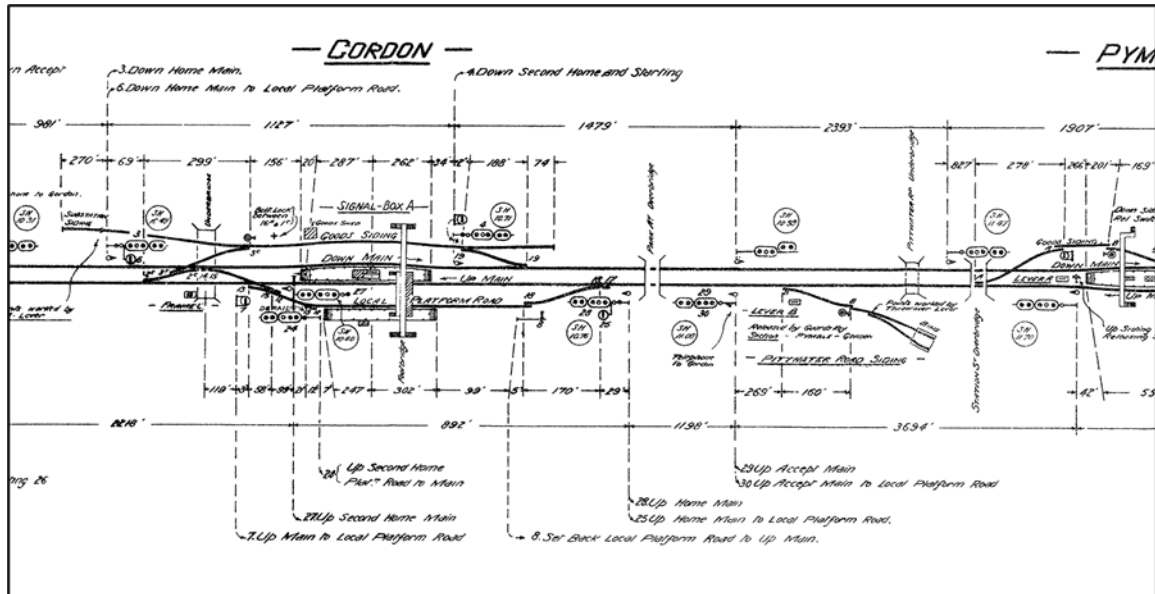
²¹ Conversation with Bob Gibson on 31st December 2024.

²² Jim Longworth incorrectly wrote that the Gordon goods sidings and shed closed "c1940". See J. Longworth, "De-Industrialisation of St. Leonards, *Australian Railway History*, April 2009, p. 116. He contradicts himself in a subsequent article when he penned that "the (Gordon) goods loop remained in operation well into the late-1960s". See J. Longworth, "Reading the Railway Landscape", *Australian Railway History*, August 2010, p. 287.

²³ Public Transport Commission, *Weekly Notice No. 20* of 1976. Thanks to Graham Harper for identifying the date.

²⁴ C.C. Singleton, "The North Shore Line", *ARHS Bulletin*, September 1959, p. 131. John Forsyth contests the closure date and states that the siding closed on 3rd April 1956. See J. H. Forsyth, *North Coast Branch Lines*, Part 1, unpublished SRA document, p. 16.

²⁵ J. Longworth, "Reading the Railway Landscape", *Australian Railway History*, August 2010, p. 287.



The above signal diagram shows the location of the Pittwater Road Sidings. Access to the sidings was by the use of a Guard's key. When not in use, the key was kept by the Station Master at Pymble.

The 1934 Metropolitan Local Appendix provided the following information

PITTWATER ROAD.

These Sidings are connected to the Up Shore line and can only be worked by Up trains. As the Sidings terminate at Dead-ends on an elevated structure, vehicles are not to be loose-shunted therein. A capstan is provided to facilitate shunting operations when engine is not available.

Stop Board.—A Stop Board is provided near the Metal Bins, and engines must not proceed beyond this Stop Board. A Stop Board is also provided at the Fouling Point between these Sidings.



*The photograph on the left, taken about 1928, shows the two sidings with the bins at the far ends of the tracks. The capstan to move the rollingstock is in the foreground. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 1995 Ku-ring-gai Library Local History Collection.*

*This photograph shows the bins underneath the two tracks. The long handles open and close the outlets. The gravel discharged into road vehicles beneath the bins. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 1810 Ku-ring-gai Library Local History Collection.*





*This photograph, taken between 1910 and 1927, shows the early effort to beautify the platform. It was policy for island platforms to place the entrance to the male toilet as far away as possible from the point of pedestrian entry to the platform. This policy was implemented at Gordon. The photograph shows the male toilet behind the privacy screen at the southern end of the building. A bit of the goods shed is visible on the left. It was relocated to a more southerly location in 1909 to allow for the construction of the ramps to the proposed footbridge, which came in 1910. **SOURCE:** K. Cook, *The Railway Came to Ku-ring-gai*, Pymble, Genlin Investments, 1991, p. 30.*

STATION MASTER'S RESIDENCE



There were several characteristics of the Station Master's cottage that oozed low cost. These were: the timber construction, the small size, the absence of decorations and the limited heating. Stepped access to residential accommodation was most unusual. While the platform fencing was formed of three horizontal timber rails, the front elevation of the station officer's house had the more attractive pickets. Six feet high hardwood palings attached to two-rail timber frames marked the side and back boundaries. SOURCE: K. Cook, The Railway Came to Ku-ring-gai, Pymble, Genlin Investments, 1991, p. 30.

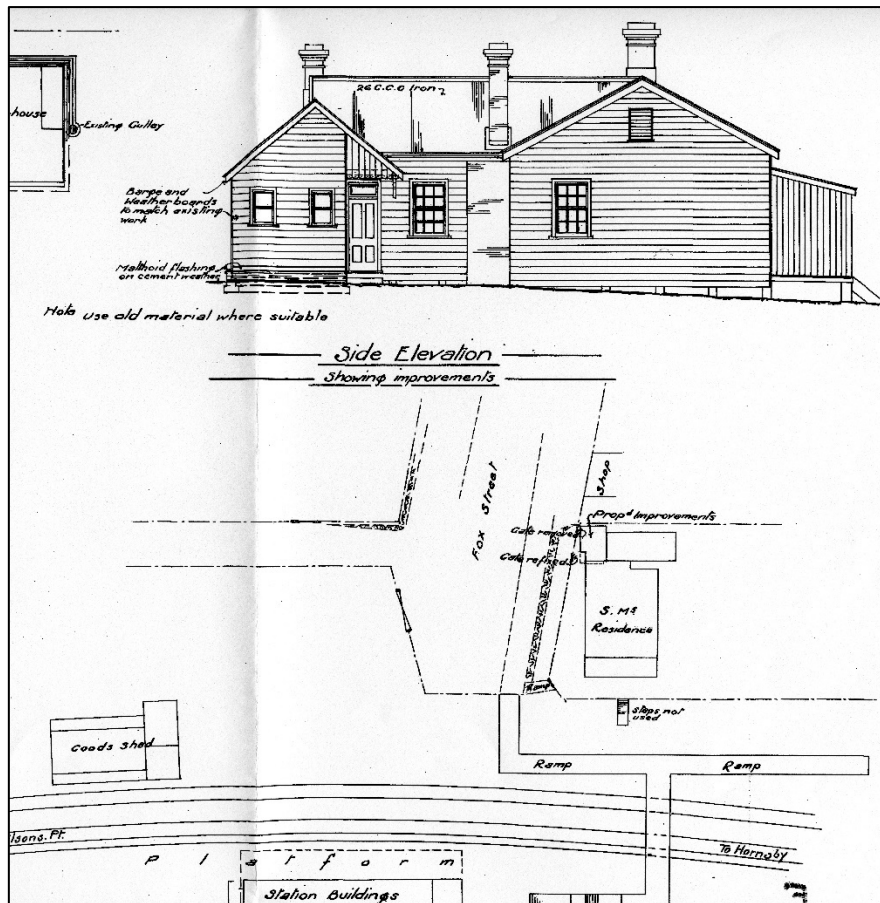
The *Evening News* newspaper, 1st January, 1890, page 6 said:

“A timber residence was constructed on the approach from Lane Cove Road (i.e. the Pacific Highway) and initially erected for the Resident Engineer, but would now serve the Station Master”.

The timber cottage provided an office and house for the Resident Engineer, Mr Quodling, who supervised construction of the line. It was located on the corner of St. Johns Avenue & Wade Lane but demolished in 1929 by Slack & Co., which was a Parramatta based real estate agent. From 1922, the New South Wales Railways was selling vacant land adjoining the rail corridor at Gordon and it appears that the official residence was sold and demolished as part of a land sale.

Also, a timber gatehouse was located at Mount William Street. It was of a standard design with a gabled roof and a front verandah extending the full width of the structure. The front of the house faced Gordon station. It was located on the western side of the line on the northern side of the level crossing. The gatehouse was similar in materials, size and design to the Station Master's residence opposite the platform. The level crossing was closed in 1927 and was replaced by a subway. Its claim to fame was that it was the last level crossing to be closed on the North Shore line. The gatehouse was demolished in 1971.²⁶

²⁶ K. Cook, *The Railway Came to Ku-ring-gai*, Pymble, Genlin Investments, 1991, p. 30.



Above is part of plan dated 1912 which converted the former kitchen, shown by the middle chimney and adjacent window, into a new dining room. The Station Master obviously had a large family as the original dining room was converted into a bedroom and an additional bedroom was added to the rear, making four bedrooms in total. Even in 1912, only two of four bedrooms had fireplaces. Still further to the rear, marked by the chimney on the left and two windows were the new kitchen, a separate bathroom and a separate "wash house". It is surprising that the family toilet was not attached to the dwelling. The previous photograph shows a set of stairs leading to the front verandah. There is a remark on the 1912 plan: "Steps not used". Instead, like access to the station, a ramp was utilised for pedestrian access and a new entrance, shown above to the right of the twin windows, was the main access point.

PART 3 - SINGLE LINE & TWO PLATFORMS



This photograph, supposedly dated about 1905, shows the 1888-approved platform building. One interesting aspect is the difference in the colour of the two platform surfaces. The platform on the main line (on the right) shows the surface covered with crushed granite from the long-established railway quarry at Locksley whereas the surface of the platform serving the loop line (on the left) is different. It is possible and probable that, initially, the loop line platform was of timber construction with timber planks for the deck and, at a later date, rebuilt into a rammed earth platform with a brick wall. Graham Harper, signalling and safeworking historian comments about the interlocking frame seen at the end of the building on the right: "The interlocking frame contained 16 levers. Four levers have been pulled over from the vertical position into what was called the "off" position, meaning that the signals are set to allow an approaching train to enter into and proceed past the station. The lever closest to the building activated the Down Distant signal; the middle of the bunch of three levers operated the Down Home signal and the third lever in the group to have been pulled over actuated the Down Starter. Note the single pulled over lever a little way down the frame – this would be the FPL lever (i.e. Facing Point Lock) for the Sydney end loop points". Harper makes an additional comment: "I see a small window in the end of the building was inserted possibly to allow the Station Master to keep an eye on southbound trains or to oversee the lever frame to prevent unauthorised people having a fiddle with the mechanism. The window was not in the 1888 plan for the building. Another interesting aspect is the tablet (i.e. the sign outside the nearest office under the awning which, with a degree of imagination, might appear to read WAY OUT". If that were the case, the ticket office in the building would have to have been altered".
SOURCE: K. Cook, *The Railway Came to Ku-ring-gai*, Pymble, Genlin Investments, 1991, p. 30.

A second platform was erected at Gordon to serve the loop but the date of the loop and the date of the building on the loop are a bit of a puzzle. Railway historian, Mal Park, wrote that a loop was opened on 20th July 1893 together with a platform serving

the loop when the safeworking arrangements were reinstated Gordon as a place where trains could pass each other or overtake each other between Chatswood and Hornsby.²⁷ Park makes no mention of a waiting shed.

It cannot be assumed that the existing waiting shed on platform No. 1 dates from the time of the opening of the loop platform. There is even some evidence that the building predated the existing platform but that seems absolutely absurd. Possibly, the reference was an attempt to say that the waiting shed predated the present rammed earth platform but existed on the initial timber platform before being relocated to its replacement earth-filled platform with a brick face.

In the absence of an architectural plan for the structure and other possible evidence, it is not possible to indicate the precise date when the waiting shed was erected other than to say that it occurred in the 1890s and, probably, between 1893 and 1898. When the New South Wales Railways authorised the construction of a building, it entered the details in what were called Contract Books. There is an entry in Contract Book No. 256 for the expenditure of £56 for the erection of the waiting shed but, disappointingly, no date is given.²⁸

The imprecision about the date construction of the waiting shed is pretty much an irrelevancy, given that the range of date uncertainty involves only six years. There is, however, one very unusual aspect of the building that is of far greater interest. The very unusual feature was the manner in which the weatherboards on the external walls were set. For external walls, it was the policy of the New South Wales Railways to place the boards horizontal and, with very few exceptions, vertically set boards were limited to internal use. One major exception was the utilisation of vertical boards for privacy screens covering the entrance/exit to male toilets on island platforms between 1892 and 1934. The absence of an architectural plan, plus the atypical design of the studs and bracing along the rear wall, suggests that the waiting shed was erected by a local gang from the Existing Lines Branch rather than by architects in Head Office.

To give an idea of the rarity of vertical cladding, the next time the Department used the same style of fixture was for a similar sized waiting shed at North Coffs Harbour in 1925. Both the Gordon and North Coffs Harbour sheds shared the same design characteristics, namely vertically set boards on external walls, no windows, no internal wall linings and a three feet wide awning formed by an extension of the roof rafters without the aid of braces.

²⁷ M.A. Park, "The North Shore Line", *Bulletin*, February 1945, p. 22.

²⁸ The Contract Book was examined in the former SRA Archives in 1982.



The structure at Gordon on platform No. 1 measured approximately 14 feet six inches by 10 feet and belonged to a family of structures with the most numerous examples. The opening in the front is five feet four inches wide. In excess of 500 examples were erected between 1855 and 1957 not only as the main platform building but also as out of sheds, lamp rooms and standalone ticket offices not to mention to 226 signal boxes recorded by Dr. Bob Taaffe.²⁹ The above images were taken on 4th December 2024.

In one of the not-surprising, frequent incidents of inconsistency, the New South Wales Railways viewed the need for a building on a third side platform at Gordon differently to the provision of a large brick building on the opposite island platform. On the Terminal Road, it provided the small timber waiting shed 14 feet six inches by 10 feet with a skillion roof. Why not replace such a tacky, inferior-quality building at Gordon? After all, the New South Wales Railways had decided not to use skillion-roofed structures in Sydney after 1897 and now, in 1909, the design policy seems to have been build-what-you-like on the evidence of what was going on at Gordon. The New South Wales Railways was always short of money and, in 1909, when the plans for the building on the island platform were proposed, the organisation did not see any reason to replace a perfectly good structure, despite its small size, despite its inconsistent and relatively primitive design and despite its inadequate shelter against inclement weather.

As part of the station upgrading works in 1992, the 1890s timber shed was rebuilt on the design of the original shed. The structure is clad externally with timber weatherboards and has a skillion roof of corrugated steel. The structure is open-fronted with exposed framing, a concrete floor and timber bench.

While the building on platform No. 1 is a simple timber shed, it is the only surviving example of the style of building that was used extensively along the North Shore line prior to the replacement of these structures with the present Federation style.

In 2025, the only substantial timber platform buildings in the Sydney area were located at Oatley, Penshurst and Berala. Small timber waiting sheds were also located at

²⁹ R.T. Taaffe, *Signal Boxes of the New South Wales Railway and Tramways*, Vol. 1, Hobart Taaffe Press, 2019, pp. 248-259.

Yennora, Gordon, Rhodes, Homebush and Cowan. These structures represent 2% of the total number of platform buildings in the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong metropolitan areas.

PART 4 – THREE LINES & THREE PLATFORMS

TRACK DUPLICATION

The North Shore line was duplicated between St. Leonards and Lindfield on 17th October 1900 and between Lindfield and Hornsby in three periods within 1909. The lines through Gordon station were slewed into position for the new duplicated track on 12th September 1909.

DID THE NEW SOUTH WALES RAILWAYS ALLOCATE A PLATFORM BUILDING TO GORDON STATION WHICH WAS APPROPRIATE FOR THE COMMUNITY IT WAS TO SERVE?

Yes. As Gordon received what every other station got north of St. Leonards, it was impossible to maintain that it was treated unfairly either positively or negatively.

The New South Wales Railways always used standard platform building designs but never produced standard plans until 1899. From 1900 to about 1922, the Railways implemented a policy in relation to track duplication that dictated that virtually every platform building was to be of the same design, apart from waiting sheds in rural areas. The only variable was length. It was this policy that was implemented on the North Shore line as well as the Blue Mountains line and the section of the southern line between Tahmoor and Wingello. The Illawarra line was regarded by many observers as the Cinderella line and its stations upon track duplication received inconsistent treatment in relation to the design of new platform buildings.

THE ORDER OF CONSTRUCTION OF DUPLICATION BUILDINGS AT GORDON

On several occasions in 1907, the Gordon Progress Association had requested the Railway Commissioners to continue with the duplication of the North Shore line. In January 1908, the Association said that it would get its local Member of Parliament, Charles Wade, to lead another deputation to the Commissioners. The Commissioners had previously stated that work would begin when it received funding. Then, luck came the Association's way. Wade became Premier on 2nd October 1907 and remained in that office until 20th October 1910. Not unsurprisingly, the Commissioners announced in September 1908 that authorisation had been given for the duplication of the line

north of Lindfield through Wade's electorate.³⁰ Work started initially on the section between Wahroonga and Hornsby.³¹

The date of construction period for many Railway buildings in New South Wales is unknown. That is the case for Gordon station when the line was duplicated. If a plan exists, a date of the preparation of the plan is often available but that did not occur in the case of Gordon. The date expressed in one Railway document, which is a secondary source prepared by the Railways' Archives Officer, for the completion of the present brick platform building is 24th October 1909, which is also the date for the opening of track electrification between Lindfield and Gordon.³² Unfortunately, no evidence is cited. Below is a table showing the known dates of the various structures. The origin of the dates is a mixture.

TABLE: DATES OF DUPLICATION BUILDINGS AT GORDON

CONSTRUCTION DATE	BUILDING	ORIGIN OF THE CONSTRUCTION DATE
30 th June 1909	Lamp room of southern end of the platform	Date of preparation of architectural plan
1909	Platform building	(1) Plan dated 4 th August 1909 shows the outline of the 1888 building. (2) Suggestive remark about a new building in <i>Daily Telegraph</i> , 20 th October 1909, p. 14. (3) Indirect reference to the possible erection of "a fine building" in the <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> , 7th December 1909, p. 4. (4) Known to have been erected by April 1910.
14th September 1909	Booking & parcels office on pedestrian bridge	Date of preparation of architectural plan
3rd November 1909	Steel overhead footbridge	Date of preparation of architectural plan

³⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 25th September 1908, p. 3.

³¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 18th September 1908, p. 4.

³² J. H. Forsyth, *North Coast Branch Lines*, Part 1, unpublished SRA document, p. 16.

By April 1909, the platform buildings at Waitara and Warrawee had been erected. All references to Gordon were posed in the future tense.³³ In May 1909, there was still no work at Gordon.³⁴ By October, work was under way at Gordon, with the press writing:

“At Pymble and Wahroonga substantial structures have been erected. ... It is understood that there will be a re-arrangement of the traffic, making Gordon the end of what is known as the suburban section, hitherto Lindfield. Additional accommodation is being provided at Gordon for this purpose. The whole work is being carried out under the supervision of the departmental officers”.³⁵

There is one puzzling aspect in relation to the Gordon platform building. It did contain a ticket office and, possibly, a parcels office. Why did the Department include a platform ticket office when it intended to provide ticket and parcels facilities on the footbridge? That may have occurred for no other reason than most stations north of Chatswood were built to a single, standard plan. While that plan is missing, the absence of surviving architectural plans of the duplication platform buildings for Gordon, Lindfield (platform Nos. 2 & 3), Pymble, Wahroonga, Waitara and Warrawee suggests the structures were built from a standard plan.³⁶ It is common for a single plan not to have survived but the absence of plans for six stations in the same geographic region is suspicious. In essence, Gordon got a platform building that the Railways chose and not because of any local rail passenger or freight demand.

Never in the history of New South Wales railway stations prior to 1989 did the Railway administration ask local communities about the design and size of intended structures. There was no legal requirement to do so and, in any case, senior Railway officers considered that they held a monopoly on the knowledge for the selection of the appropriate building for a particular location.

THE DEFINITION OF THE NORTH SHORE AND ITS RELEVANCY TO THE DESIGN OF THE PLATFORM BUILDING AT THE TIME OF TRACK DUPLICATION

The major project on existing lines in 1909 was the completion of the duplication of the North Shore railway between Milsons Point and Hornsby. Sections of the line had already been duplicated and the project in 1909 involving Gordon was intended to complete the duplication on the entire length. There was one interesting issue

³³ *Daily Telegraph*, 14th April 1909, p. 7.

³⁴ *Evening News*, 8th May 1909, p. 3.

³⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 20th October 1909, p. 14.

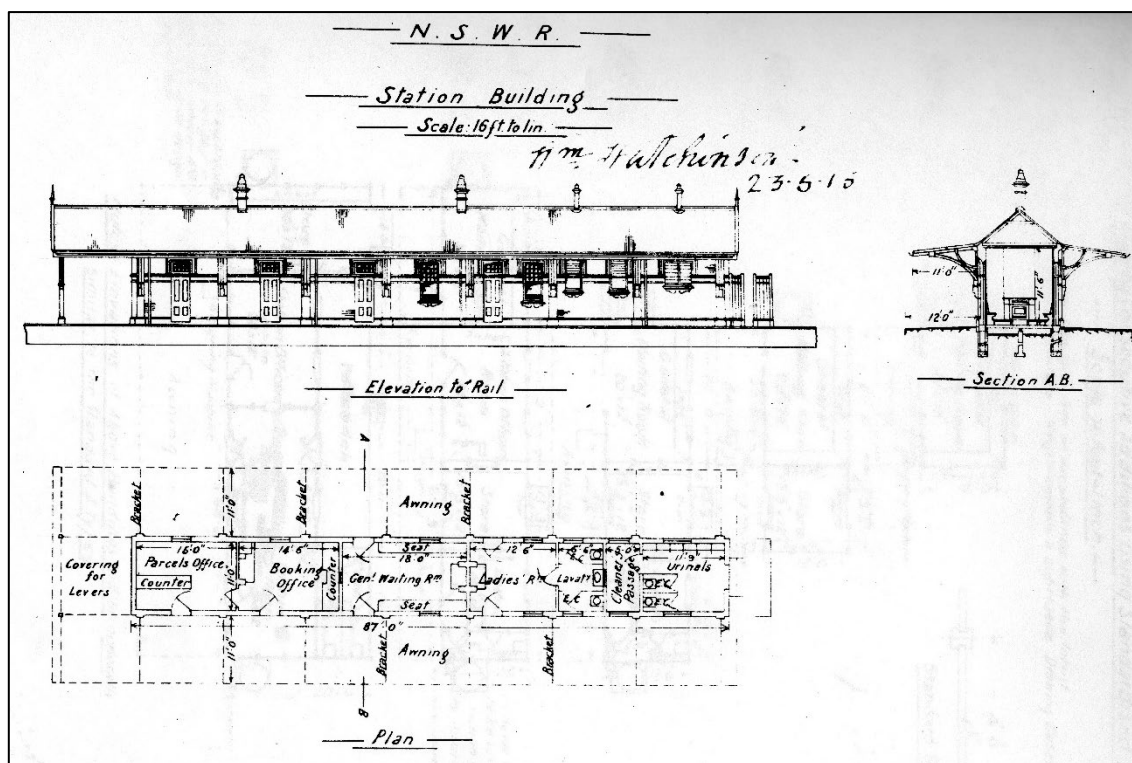
³⁶ Also missing are plans for the buildings at Chatswood No. 1 platform and the 1893 buildings at Wollstonecraft.

associated with the line and that was the definition of “North Shore”. So far as the New South Wales Railways was concerned, the “North Shore” of the North Shore line was restricted to that part north of Chatswood inclusive to Waitara. In 1909, the New South Wales Railways demonstrated its understanding of the definition of “North Shore” by replacing every timber building north of Chatswood with a pretty much, standard Federation-influenced brick building, though some detailing at some stations was different to other stations.



On 8th November 1980, this was the view of the platform buildings from the footbridge. Platform Nos. 2 and 3 date from 1909. Platform No. 2 was the original platform when there was only a single main line between 1890 and 1927. The second platform is shown on the left and was erected in the 1890s. The third platform was No.3, which was erected in 1927. There were two things shown in this photograph which suggest that the Electrical Branch of the New South Wales Railways had zero interest in maintaining the aesthetics of the station – any station, in fact. Firstly, note the ugliness of the electrical conduit protruding from the footbridge to the building on platform Nos. 2 and 3. Secondly, observe the unnecessary penetration of the vertical elements of the overhead wiring structures into the platform awnings. Yes. The tops of the vertical members were capped with attractive pyramidal shaped hats but their quaintness did not make up for a total departmental disinterest in spacing the portal structures to avoid ruining the appearance of the building. Not only was the roof hurt, but the placement of the stanchion onto the platform added to the clutter that distracted from the elegance of the platform building. One chimney and the two Breaches Cows have been removed.³⁷ The advertising hoardings on the right mark the place of the post-1909 goods shed and siding. In the far distance, adjacent to the Up Main line, is the Gordon traction sub-station.

³⁷ A Breaches Cowl was the official, departmental name for metal ventilators to vent the ceiling cavity.



The plan for the 1909 building on platform Nos. 2 and 3 at Gordon does not survive, as is the case for most of the structures erected at the time of track duplication on the North Shore. Nevertheless, there survives a standard plan of the same design, displayed above, which was authorised by William Hutchinson, the then Chief Engineer Railway Construction on 23rd May 1913 – four years after the construction of the Gordon building. The plan was coded A10. According to a later standard plan, the structure was to be 87 feet long by 11 feet wide internally. As built, the structure accorded to the planned length of 87 feet, exclusive of the signal box, and 12 feet six inches wide externally. The arrangement of the doors and windows in the above standard plan accords with the No. 2 platform side of the building at Gordon. So far as standard plans are concerned, the letters and numerals meant different things at different times. In this case, “A” simply meant a passenger station platform building. Numerals 1 to 10 were utilised to indicate the length of the structure, with 10 being the longest. The only difference between this standard plan and the Gordon building related to the booking office towards the centre. With the opening of the booking office on the overbridge at Gordon in 1910, the booking office became the Station Master’s office.

South of Chatswood, the New South Wales Railways disclosed its understanding of the regional boundaries by making every one of the platform buildings between Chatswood and Milsons Point of timber construction, apart from St Leonards where a brick building existed as the terminus of the first part of the line in 1890.³⁸ When the line was extended to Sydney Harbour in 1893 all the station buildings were timber,

³⁸ Artarmon in 1898 initially possessed a timber building of similar design to those north of Chatswood which was replaced in 1902 by the relocation of the brick station at Glenbrook when the single line there was abandoned and a new building was erected on the two track deviation erected.

possibly because that year was affected by the global financial Depression. Possibly that was the explanation and possibly it was not the explanation because, also in 1893, the New South Wales Railways did approve a number of brick buildings at Temora, Parkes and Forbes. There is an equal chance that the explanation for the use of brickwork north of Chatswood was related to the elitism as many of the high-ranking Railway officials resided on the “North Shore”, meaning north of Chatswood.

The application of elitism as the explanation gains a lot of ground in 1909 when it was decided to provide a new platform building at Wollstonecraft. Since Wollstonecraft was not perceived to be on the North Shore, it was not intended to build a brick structure. When it was planned to build a new brick structure at Gordon to replace the existing timber building, the New South Wales Railways decided to relocate the timber building from Gordon to Wollstonecraft on the southbound platform. An additional 15 feet of office space was added to the structure when the building was re-assembled at Wollstonecraft in 1909. The open-fronted general waiting room was retained, the chimneys were rebuilt and the posted verandah was retained initially, then remodelled with cantilevered brackets. There was one semi-attached pavilion which provided toilets and this also was relocated to Wollstonecraft.

At Gordon, track duplication involved the replacement of one of the two existing two single-sided platforms by a new island platform with a brick island platform building. The original main line platform (present No. 2 platform) served the Up Main line and a new No. 3 platform on the opposite side of the island platform served the Down Main line. The existing No. 1 platform that served the loop was reclassified as the Terminating Road where local trains stopped and commenced their run back to the city.



*This 1924 photograph shows the beautification works on the left. Four platform seats are located under the awning on platform No. 2 with a fifth seat beyond the building. The seat at the far right is a post-1890 product, which can be dated by the omission of armrests. On the righthand side is the interlocking frame which has yet to be enclosed with walls. The roof ridge has been penetrated by two brick chimneys. Nearest to the camera, the chimney serves fireplaces in the ticket office and in the parcels office whilst the distant chimney vents fireplaces in the general waiting room and in the ladies' waiting room. Beyond the chimneys are ventilators piercing the ridge which dissipated odours from the male and female toilets. These were officially known as Breaches Cows. **SOURCE:** Photograph No 0889607 ARHS Railway Archives.*

THE FAMILY OF BUILDINGS TO WHICH THE 1909 GORDON PLATFORM STRUCTURE BELONGS

The Gordon station building was one of 272 examples of the same type erected between 1892 and 1934.³⁹ It was the 42nd example built. This class of building, known as the Federation-influenced style, represented 16% of all structures erected on platforms between 1855 and 1980. A total of 143 or 53% were of brick construction and these were mainly in urban areas. Now that says something about the location of power! The remainder were built of timber and tended to be located in rural locations. For example, every platform building on the North Coast line being planned between 1909 and 1919 was of timber construction, as were most duplication structures on the Main Southern line between 1912 and 1917.⁴⁰

The design as used initially at Kiama in 1892 was applied to a further 21 examples until 1906 in various locations. In that latter year, a new, comparatively less-ornate but still very attractive standard was approved for Wahroonga and this in turn became the new standard until 1911. From 1912 to 1924, the design of the rendered aprons under the window sills changed. There was a variation in the size of windows with larger windows (the standard being two feet ten inches wide) and smaller windows (the standard being two feet wide). After 1924, all examples until 1935 were stripped of much of the external decorations.

The family to which the Gordon building belongs has no formal label, but it belongs to a group of buildings that was influenced by trends in architecture in the general community and, in particular, what is known as the Federation style. The earliest examples in the 1890s were also influenced by decorative features on buildings in the 1880s, such as the chamfering of window reveals, the application of render around openings, the style of doors and the application of string courses on external brick walls.

³⁹ S. Sharp, *The Railway Stations of New South Wales*, unpublished M. Ec. (Hons.) thesis, Sydney University, 1982, Vol. 2, p. 266.

⁴⁰ There was one exception, namely the Kempsey refreshment room.

It would be incorrect to describe these buildings as examples of Federation architecture, but it is reasonable to describe them as being influenced by the Federation style. It is also reasonable to describe the structures as the initial island platform building design as these were the very first structures designed and used specifically for island platforms. The Federation-influenced style was used by the New South Wales Railways between 1892 and 1934 in all parts of the State but the 43-year period can be divided into four distinct sub-periods, namely:

- 1892 – 1899
- 1906 – 1911
- 1912 – 1924
- 1925 – 1935

The first period was from 1892 to 1899 during which time the buildings usually but not always had a higher level of ornamentation and a degree of ornamental differences between the examples. The present building at Turramurra belongs to this first group. The second time period extended from 1901 to 1911 and represented a stage 1 of a standard form of ornamentation. The next group of Federation-influenced buildings dates from 1912 to 1924 during which time the application of ornamentation was standardised on a less spectacular basis and the structures at Wahroonga and Waitara and the other buildings on the North Shore line date from this 1906-1911 time period. The fourth period was from 1925 to 1935 and this was marked by a further but substantial reduction in the level of ornamentation on examples. The present platform building at Petersham, the recently demolished Sydenham platform No. 6 and at Redfern platform No. 10 are examples of the post 1924 period.

THE INGREDIENTS INTO PLANNING OF THE DESIGN OF THE GORDON BUILDING

1. THE BIG CHANGE – ISLAND PLATFORMS

It was the need to build structures for island platforms that was the stimulus to abandon the way platform edifices were planned before 1890. The design for island platforms had to cater for trains running at speed on both sides of the platform. Prior to 1890, very few island platforms existed, such as at Granville (1880), Redfern (1884), Strathfield (1886) and Blacktown and Raglan (both in 1890). There were also some island platforms that had what were known as back platform roads. In this category, one side of the platform featured a main running line but the opposing side track was not utilised for through running of trains but the reversal of terminating trains. In this group were Blacktown (1864), Petersham (1885) and Junee (1887).

The major problem for passengers with island platforms was the absence of safe access. There were only two options – subways or footbridges. In their absence, both staff and passengers had to walk across at least one running line and walk up one of the ramps located at each end of the platform. It was this requirement to reach the platform by its end, rather than its centre as previously was the case, that forced a major rethink on building design.

2. THE LAYOUT OF THE ROOMS

Up to 1890, plans for most stations involved travellers to enter/exit the platform at the centre of the buildings. That was the place where passengers purchased their tickets and it was that point of entry that formed the axis of the building plan. For buildings of more than two rooms, the building strategy involved adding one room to each side of the centre entry/exit point. Moderate and large buildings were always formed of odd numbers – i.e. three, five and seven. In so doing, the main platform building was always symmetrical. There was one point of aesthetic torment. It was the positioning of toilets and other functional operations, such as the need to change kerosene lamps. They were allocated separate structures and, when two of the pavilions were erected, the overall symmetry of the building suite remained. Lamentably, sometimes, only one pavilion was erected and, therefore, the symmetry disappeared.

Planning for island platforms solved the vexation about possible asymmetry. What emerged was a form of building where all the rooms were juxtaposed to form a single entity. Thus, the transition involved changing from a symmetrical model to a linear model. The ticket office retained its role but, with island platforms, it could now be placed at the nearest point of pedestrian entry. While early examples were planned that way, a lot were not, including the building at Gordon. There, the room layout still looked very much like a pre-1890 structure with the ticket office towards the centre of the building.

In addition to the pre-1890 layout of the rooms at Gordon, there was also one functional space that could not be accommodated in the building, namely a room in which the station Porters would clean and refill the platform and signal lamps. To avoid ruining the appearance of the platform building, the Railway Department erected a stand-alone brick structure off the southern end of the platform. It has since been demolished.

3. THE STRUCTURAL EXPRESSION OF THE BUILDING

The brick walls were set out in what are known as bays. Each bay was expressed by the use of engaged brick piers, standing proud of the building walls, at the ends of each bay. There were seven bays on each side wall, exclusive of the signal box. Each bay is 11 feet 4 inches long. The total length of the bays was 79 feet 4 inches. There were eight engaged brick piers separating and terminating the bays. These engaged

piers are nearly exactly one tenth the width of each bay, namely one foot one inch long, making a total wall length of 88 feet 8 inches. The total wall length of the 1909 building, taking into account the rounding off of the measurements, is 87 feet. The use of the engaged piers provides a more interesting visual engagement than, say, a straight wall.

The only bays that were inconsistent with all the others relates to the extension of the roof at the northern end to provide a weather cover over the interlocking frame. That length was 20 feet 8 inches, was nearly double the length of the other bays. The signal box accorded to the same width of the building, namely 12 feet external.

The allocation of the bays in no way indicates the positioning of the internal transverse walls and, hence, a change of a room function. The engaged piers also provide a practical function. On each pier is a corbel, measuring 24 inches high by seven inches wide. They are decorated with three vertical grooves. These corbels hold the weight of the steel brackets that cantilever from the building wall and hold the weight of the platform awnings. The engaged piers impart additional support to take the weight of the awning systems.



These two images show decorative elements. On the left is the chimney with corbelling (i.e. different levels of moulding) and a remnant of the terracotta pot. On the right is the ceiling rose on the overhead booking/parcels office. Its role was to evacuate fumes from kerosene or gas lamps. Similar roses were used in the ceilings of the 1909 platform building.

THE LIST OF AREAS OF DESIGN CHANGE BETWEEN PRE-1890 AND POST-1890 CHANGES

The list below indicates the key areas between pre-1890 brick buildings and post 1892 platform Federation-influenced structures:

- change of floor plan from symmetrical to linear
- abandonment of posted verandahs and replacement with cantilevered brackets
- substitution of timber finials with terracotta finials
- pedestrian entry to the platform from the centre of the building to one end
- simplification of the roofscape from a degree of complexity to unencumbered gabled roofs
- elimination of the use of slate for roof coverings and its replacement by sheets of corrugated iron or asbestos cement and, in a very few instances, terracotta tiles, &
- attachment of the male toilet to one end of the structure.

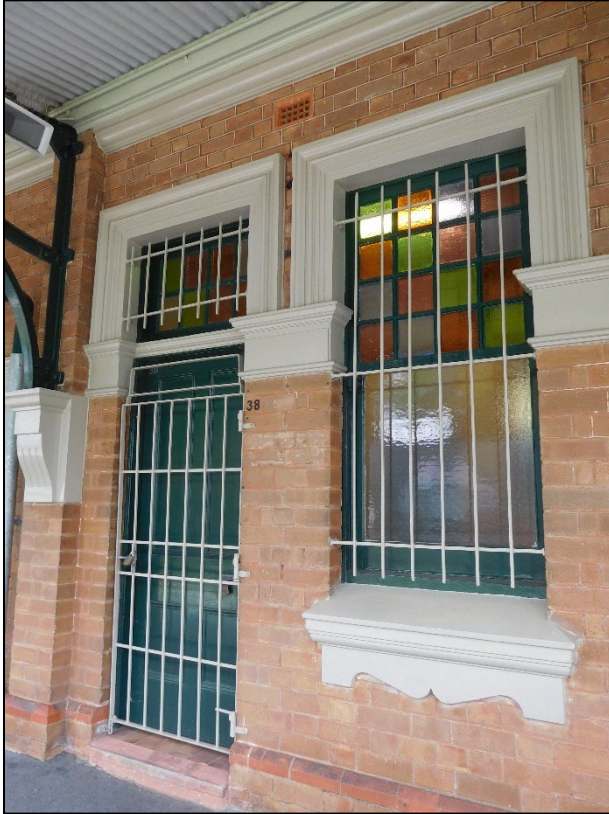
The building at Gordon did reflect six of seven of the above features. The omission was the absence of the ticket office from the northern end of the building.

ELEMENTS OF THE GORDON PLATFORM BUILDING THAT REFLECT THE FEDERATION DESIGN INFLUENCES

The platform building erected at Gordon was planned and erected at a time when the Federation style of architecture was influential outside the railway fence. The elements of the Gordon building that reflected the Federation influences were:

- The use of face brickwork for all external building walls,
- The square-headed windows,
- The use of small, multi-coloured window panes for the top sash for all windows and for fanlights above doors,
- The corbelling of the strapwork on the chimneys,
- The style of the terracotta pots on top of the chimneys (now removed),

- The position of the moulded string course around all four sides of the building exterior,
- The moulding under the window sills, known as aprons,
- The gabled ends of the building, &
- The design of the finials on the gables.



the wall.

This picture shows the decorative features of the walls of the platform building. The attractive reddish-brown colour of the bricks are complemented by tuck-pointing. At the base of the wall is the plinth course on top of which are darker red coloured, splayed bricks. The moulded string course around all external walls is integrated with the moulding around the fanlights above the doors and around the top window sashes. Underneath the rendered window sill are what are called aprons and, in the case of the building at Gordon, the design of the aprons is consistent for all windows. On later examples, aprons for toilet windows differed to other windows. In the upper window sashes are 16 panes of what was officially called Cathedral glass, meaning multi-coloured. Similarly, there are eight small panes in the fanlights above the doors. There is also a moulded cornice at the top of

While the design featured some characteristics of Federation architecture, the Gordon building also possessed features that had their origin in the preceding period of 19th century Victorian architecture. These were:

- The use of four-panel doors with the smaller panels at the bottom of the doors,
- The use of render on the building exterior as a design feature,
- The use of the chimney pots of any style,
- The use of gables to end the roofline, &
- The use of corrugated iron on the roof rather than Marseille terracotta tiles.

The major materials used in the Gordon building denote it as a very good example of NSW railway platform architecture of the period between 1906 and 1924.

No architectural plan survives of the present building on the island platform. The platform building was in existence about a year before the ticket and parcels office was erected on the overhead footbridge. The table below lists the names of the internal spaces when erected in 1909, from the southern end, their present function and comments about the surviving fabric.

TABLE: PLATFORM No. 2/3 1909 BUILDING – FUNCTIONS PAST AND PRESENT

FUNCTION IN 1909	FUNCTION IN 2025	SURVIVING 1909 FABRIC
female toilet (entrance/exit via the ladies' waiting room)	Wet store	2 closet frames & doors – treatment of internal skin of bricks – entrance to Cleaner's Passage
Cleaner's Passage (to remove toilet pans & store brooms & brushes)	Access area to service toilet suites	Floor and wall surfaces – window bringing borrowed light from ladies' toilet
female toilet (entrance/exit via the ladies' waiting room)	Bathroom facilities for train crews on terminating runs	2 closet frames and space for hand washbasin with new hand washbasin
ladies' waiting room	Facilities for train crews on terminating runs	Small corrugated iron ceiling with ornate rose – dado line around walls ⁴¹ – entrance door to closets
general waiting room	Communications equipment	Small corrugated iron ceiling with ornate rose – dado line around walls
ticket office/ Station Master's office	Storage room for building maintenance team	Small corrugated iron ceiling with ornate rose – dado line around walls
parcels office	Staff amenities	Small corrugated iron ceiling with ornate rose – dado line around walls
with the interlocking frame under the roof line but with open sides	Heritage display area	Interlocking frame, 3 bay train indicator board formerly located on the wall of the overhead

⁴¹ Up to the early 1950s, internal walls were divided into two parts separated by a moulded, horizontal line known as the dado line. Below that line, the wall was known as the dado and, above the line, the wall was called the body.

FUNCTION IN 1909	FUNCTION IN 2025	SURVIVING 1909 FABRIC
		booking/parcels office – other moveable heritage items



These two images show the interconnection between the rooms used by staff. On the left, the image taker is standing in the signal box looking south. The door to the left opens onto platform No. 2. When constructed, the door immediately in front of the picture man did not exist but the opening was erected sometime later to allow access to the interlocking frame. Still on the left, it is possible to denote the rendered string course that surrounded the former northern end of the structure. It is located between the two pictures on the wall. The room adjacent to the signal box was the original parcels office and, after 1910, became the Station Master's office. Beyond the parcels office was the former ticket office. On the right of the left image is one bay of the three bay train indicator board that was formerly attached to a wall of the overhead booking/parcels office. The image on the right side is taken from the staff amenities room (former parcels office) and looks into the former ticket office. The dado line is visible in the right image on the wall between the door reveal and the white-coloured paper towel dispenser. All the door frames display the authentic and traditional New South Wales Railway colour, known officially as light stone.

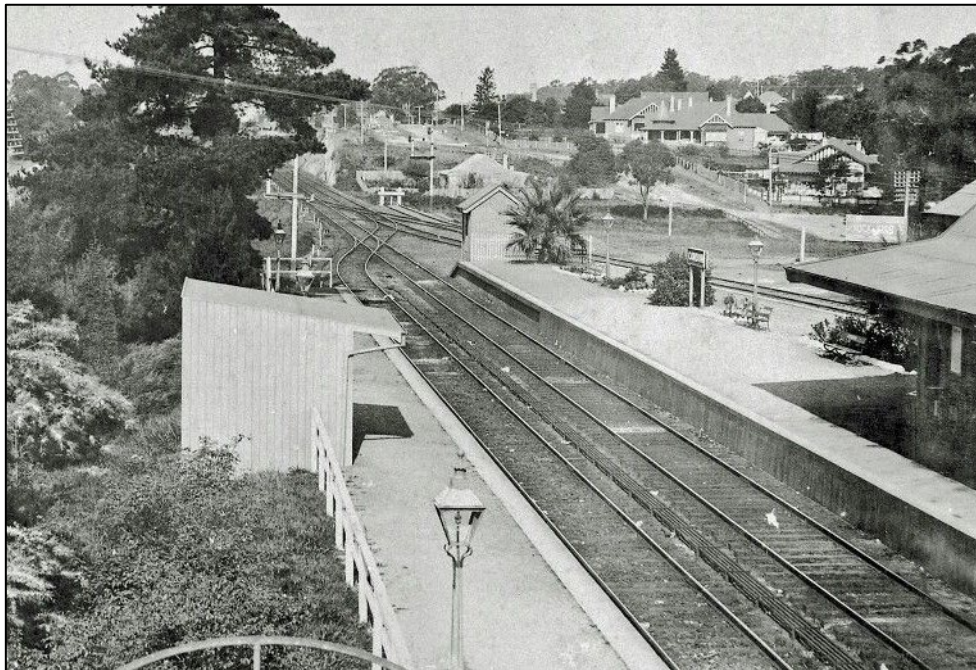
GORDON PLATFORM BUILDING DETAILS

The design features of the building were:

- building located on an island platform, except for the lamp room,
- nine-inch thick external walls using attractive red-coloured bricks,
- tuck-pointed mortar,
- c90 feet by 12 feet six inches external (11 feet internal),
- all doors to a standard width of two feet ten inches
- all windows, except those for the toilets to a standard width of two feet ten inches
- planned 11 feet wide platform awnings on each side of the building for the length of the structure (awnings not built to plan),
- gabled roof covered with sheets of corrugated iron,
- roof of the structure extended at the northern end for the provision of a safeworking interlocking frame,
- steel awning brackets positioned on 16 sandstone corbels seven inches wide (eight on each side of the structure),
- awning brackets which would be later officially known as “standard awning brackets”, being in the shape of two inverted “U” shaped metal elements,
- the roof ridge penetrated by two brick chimneys and two metal Breaches Cows that provided ventilation to the toilets,
- fireplaces with hearths 2 feet 10 inches wide in the booking office, general waiting room, the ticket office and the ladies’ waiting room,
- rendered string course around the exterior walls,
- moulded cornice at top of all external walls,
- square shaped moulding around the window heads and moulded aprons under the window sills with a consistent design for all aprons,
- 16 small panes of Cathedral (i.e. coloured) glass used in the upper window sashes and eight panes for the fanlights,
- bottom of selected windows framed to include a station nameplate in blue coloured glass with embossed white letters,
- ceiling height of 11 feet 6 inches,
- strapwork on the brick chimneys and terracotta pots on the top of the chimneys,
- concrete was used for the floor in men’s toilet and ‘Cleaner’s Passage’,
- vertically set timber weatherboards used for the privacy screen outside the entrance to the male toilet,
- red coloured splayed bricks on top of a one foot high plinth course at base of the walls on all sides of the building, &
- timber finials on the gables.



The water bubbler was a standard fixture for most urban stations. This image on 13th March 2003 reveals two other expressions of standard station construction. These were the use of brown paint, called stone (in three shades) in Railway parlance. Here, the paint has been applied to stop water penetrating into the brick walls. As the walls had no cavity, water would continue travelling through the two skins of brickwork and damage the internal plaster on the walls. Some of the tuckpointing of the mortar is also visible.



*There is a lot to examine in this photograph. In the foreground, platform No. 1 has been rebuilt and the surface covered with Locksley granite. Two rail timber fencing has been erected at the rear of the platform with a garden behind the fence. The top rail has been rotated to stand on one edge. The Railways called the fence "park" style. As this new-look fence presentation first appeared in 1917, the date of the photograph is sometime between 1917 and 1927. The standard platform length was 520 feet. Platform No. 1 was 523 feet long and platform Nos. 2 and 3 platforms were 540 feet long. These, together with those at Artarmon were the longest on the North Shore line in the 1960s. Note the extension of platform Nos. 2 and 3, which dates from 1904. Off the end of platform Nos. 2 and 3 is the brick lamp room, which was approved in 1909. **SOURCE:** Google.*



When the island platform was built in 1909, the coping at the top of the brick wall on platform No. 3 was cantilevered beyond the face of the wall. From the centre of the building, the platform serving the Down Main line was 14 feet eight and a half inches wide and the platform for the Up Main line was 13 feet nine and a half inches wide. In other words, the building was positioned slightly off-centre. This same inconsistency occurred also at Lindfield, Pymble, Killara and Turramurra. At the time, platform No. 1 was nine feet wide. The North Shore line was electrified on 15th August 1927. Elegance was still a design virtue in 1927 and that was reflected by the placement of steel, pyramidal-shaped caps on top of the vertical elements of the portal structures for electrification. Hang on! Didn't the author say that the Electrical Branch had zero interest in aesthetics? Yes. That is correct. All the structures for electrification were designed by the staff of the Way and Works Branch – not the Electrical Branch, whose job was restricted to installation. There are several elements that gave character to the Railways. These were the round-top garbage bin with the sprung loaded lid; the small timber box where the staff kept their brooms; the silver coloured weighing machine; the green painted platform seats with the station name expressed in yellow coloured paint; the shrubs on the platform and the lamp room off the end of the platform. The photograph was taken on 8th November 1980.

A design feature of buildings on island platforms built in the 20th century was their narrowness. The predominant, standard, internal width was 11 feet. Some were ten feet wide and some 12 feet.

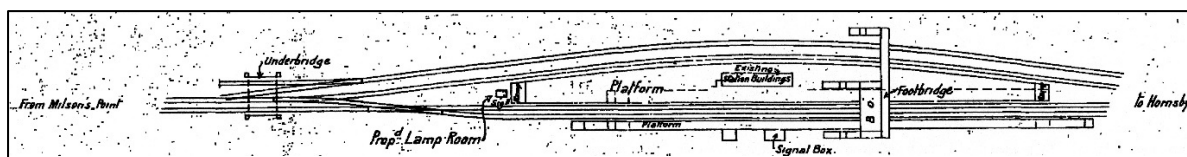
The bricks for the platform buildings on the North Shore line which were erected for the duplication of the track came from more than one brickworks. The buildings were built by day labour employed directly by the New South Wales Railways. The building at Gordon is typical of its time of construction.

The reddish bricks for the walls were tuck pointed with a rendered string course around all four walls. The heads of windows and doors were decorated with render, as were the sills and aprons underneath them. The employment of a gabled roof was standard practice for the design as was the engagement of vertical boards to cover the gables. A privacy screen, sheeted with vertical boarding, covered the entrance/exit to the male toilet. The employment of vertical boards for external use on New South Railway buildings was extremely rare but external privacy screens for men and internal privacy screens for women were exceptions.

The platform awnings are supported by cantilevered cast iron awning brackets of a standard design for the 1900-1932 period. They sat on corbels made of either sandstone or concrete between seven and nine inches wide.

The internal walls were rendered with a dado line expressed in the mortar. Public rooms featured metal ceilings formed with small corrugations with ceiling roses to dissipate the fumes from either kerosene or gas lighting. In non-public spaces, the ceilings were often covered with lath and plaster. To facilitate the dispersion of adverse odours, there was often no ceiling in the male toilet.

At the time of track duplication, there was no road access on the eastern side of the line to the station. A plan dated 30th June 1909 shows no pedestrian or road access to the station from the eastern side of the rail corridor. The Railway Department had a rethink, no doubt under pressure the State Premier (and Member for the area), and the plan for the overhead bridge, dated 3rd November 1909, displayed an extension of the footbridge together with stepways to the eastern side. The Department resumed land in 1910 between Khartoum Street and McIntosh Street to form what is now Werona Avenue, thus establishing access to the new footbridge from both sides of the railway corridor.



The above plan, dated 30th June 1909, shows some interesting features. Firstly, it describes the present building on platform Nos. 2 and 3 as “existing”. Secondly, the footbridge does not extend to meet the present Werona Avenue on the eastern side. Thirdly, there are four running lines past the station, with an additional line on the western side. Fourthly, a signal box located on platform No. 1 – not on platform Nos. 2 and 3 where it was opened in 1909. Lastly, the overhead booking and parcels office is shown to be located on the southern side of the footbridge and not its present location on the north side.

COMMUNITY REACTION TO THE NEW PLATFORM BUILDING

There are few press references to any platform building on the North Shore line. Clearly, the buildings were insufficient in any way to engage newspaper reporters to make comments. The uniformity of the design at the various stations was another factor that disengaged commentators.

There is one indirect reaction to the building at Gordon. It was made by the people of Hornsby. Residents at Hornsby did not like what was happening at their station. The Hornsby Progress Association in December 1909 maintained that the buildings at Hornsby brought discredit on the community, although Chief Commissioner Johnson maintained that, when finished, the station “would be a very handsome one”. Because the awnings over the platforms were formed by extensions of the roof rafters rather than cantilevered brackets, the Progress Association considered the structures were temporary and “were neither an attraction nor a credit to the place”. The Association said:

“All the other stations had fine up to date buildings whilst Hornsby was supplied with buildings that only could be described as dog kennels”.⁴²

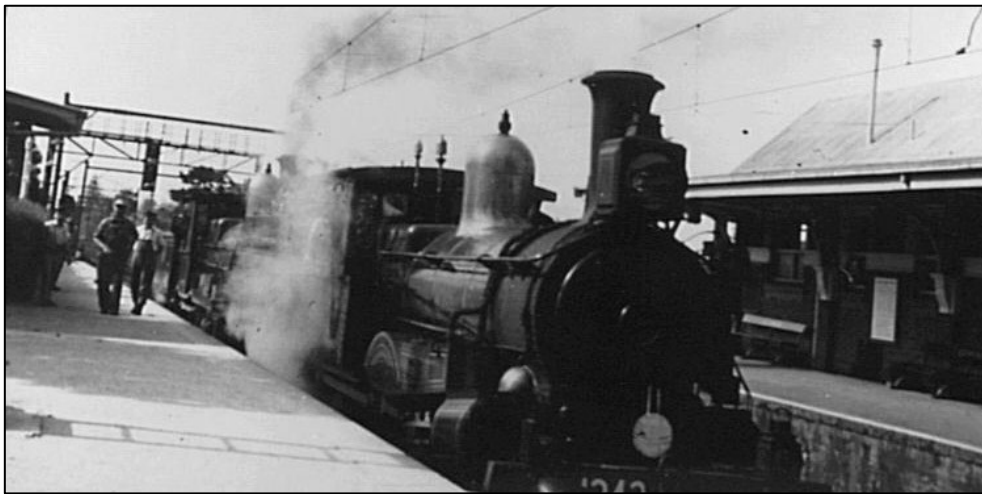


*The above photograph, taken between 1910 and 1927, shows the platform buildings at Hornsby which upset the Hornsby Progress Association because of their relative unattractiveness. The Association wanted buildings of the same design as those at Gordon and most other stations. Instead, cheaper structures were erected and, instead of cantilevered platform awnings 11 or so feet wide, the Railway Department extended the roof rafters which provided narrow awnings six feet wide. **SOURCE:** Pinterest.*

Another press clipping was of a general nature but was inclusive of the work at Gordon. It stated:

⁴² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7th December 1909, p. 4.

“In addition to the work on the permanent way, extensive alterations have been carried out, or are in progress, at the various stations. Island platforms have been built at all stations, and, with the exception of Waitara, will be approached by overhead bridges. The station buildings, too, add much to the appearance of the platforms. They are built of brick, according to the latest departmental plans. The awnings have been made more attractive and convenient by the adoption of the cantilever principle, thus doing away with the posts so objectionable at other stations. The platforms have been extended, giving space for longer trains than those now running. The overhead bridges at several of the stations have yet to be erected. Waitara, alone, has been given a subway, and it serves to show the advantage of this means of access over that favored by the Chief Commissioner”.⁴³



*This photograph of 1243 and 1709 travelling light engines towards North Sydney was taken between 1960 and 1965. They were proceeding to North Sydney to attach to the Railway Department's official vintage train, including the former State carriage coded AC. Note that the Breaches Cowls over the toilets on the ridge of the roof of the building on platform Nos. 2 and 3 have been replaced by new, smaller vents. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 1092 Ku-ring-gai Library Local History Collection.*

THE ORIGINAL, INTERNAL FABRIC THAT SURVIVES

The 1909 building on platform Nos. 2 and 3 retains a significant level of original fabric. The urinal in the male toilet is gone but the two closets remain. They have been modernised in the 1960s or 1970s with new suites but that work is also a part of the structure's history as it demonstrates that, in earlier times, unsympathetic materials and inappropriate colours were installed without regard to the character of the structure. the same remark also applies to the colourful floor tiles.

⁴³ *Daily Telegraph*, 20th October 1914, p. 14.



These two 2025 images show aspects of the male toilet. There was always a hierarchy of rooms in railway buildings. At the bottom were toilets and lamp rooms. While the off-platform lamp room has been demolished, the male toilet provides the evidence of its lowly status. A false roof has been inserted in an attempt to cover the original absence of a ceiling. On the left, the picture shows part of one of the upgraded closets. The image also reveals the entrance to what was termed the 'Cleaner's Passage'. It was a transverse corridor from which pans would be removed from the male closets on one side and the female closets on the other side. In normal circumstances, the sanitary contractor to the local government authority would change the pans on a regular basis. The Railway Department paid an annual fee to the local council for the service. In rural area, the local fettling gang would carry out the work. On the right, the picture shows the inside wall, which was not rendered due to the low status of the space. Toilet closets were, up to the 1950s, raised six inches above the floor level of male toilets, possibly to facilitate washing the floor. Although that feature has not been retained in the closet area, the Cleaner's Passage does indeed show the closets being six inches above the floor level.

NEXT BIT

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THE FOOTBRIDGE 1910

The Gordon Progress Association met the Railway Commissioners on 19th July 1909 and asked the Railway Department to provide a subway rather than a footbridge. The Association considered that a footbridge would "disfigure" the area.⁴⁴ The Association was correct. Moreover, the topography of the site favoured a subway. The Chief

⁴⁴ *The Star*, 20th July 1909, p. 6.

Commissioner told the deputation that, if the Association paid for the difference between the subway and the footbridge, his Department would build the subway. The Secretary for Railways replied in September 1909 saying that a subway would cost £4,000 compared to £1,800 for a footbridge. The Association declined to pay the difference. However, the Department agreed to the Association's request to provide ramps to the deck of the footbridge.⁴⁵

Twenty years after the negative impact of the footbridge was published, one newspaper correspondent in 1929 continued to refer to "the ugly railway station".⁴⁶



On 8th November 1980 – 70 years after construction, it was still possible to understand the claim of disfigurement of the area by the erection of the footbridge. The picture shows what architects describe as busy. There are trestles and steel balustrades almost everywhere, making it difficult to interpret the simple elegance of the booking office or the peacefulness of the curved steel supports for the incandescent lights over the stepways. The original asbestos cement 'slates' (as the Railways called them) protect the roof of the booking office. The most colourful object in the photograph was the Lawrence Drycleaning shop at the left with its red and white paint. One wonders whether senior Railway executives witnessed the Lawrence Drycleaning colour palette, with its obvious attractiveness, and adopted it (i.e. the red and white paint) as the system-wide range of colours for CityRail, which was established in 1989.

The Railway Department announced construction of the pedestrian bridge in September 1909.⁴⁷ It is a rare treat to find out the name of the draftsmen who prepared drawings for station buildings but that rare event did occur twice in the case of Gordon station. The plan for the existing overhead bridge was drawn by W.E. Maclean and it was traced by T.E. Moorhouse. They dated the plan 3rd November 1909.

⁴⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 10th September 1909, p. 11.

⁴⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8th June 1929, p. 11.

⁴⁷ *Construction: Weekly Supplement to Building*, 14th September 1909, p. 3.

The deck of the bridge is 91 feet long and nine feet wide, widening to 37 feet in the centre to allow for the positioning of the ticket and parcels office. The deck of the footbridge is supported by steel haunched beams. Haunched beams transfer the load to the trestles by their variation in section and are designed to minimise the depth of the beam. As Jennifer Harvey writes, Gordon station was one of 22 examples of the use of haunched beams on stations providing only platform access, keeping in mind there was no cross-corridor connection between the western and eastern sides of the railway corridor.⁴⁸

The deck of the footbridge was originally hardwood, which has been replaced by concrete slabs. The balustrades were originally formed by six feet high corrugated iron sheets but they have been replaced by steel balustrades. The original timber treads and risers on the stepways have been replaced by pre-cast concrete steps.

The singularly outstanding feature of the footbridge is the application of ramps. Their use at Gordon was in conjunction with the stepways. Their use was rare with only ramps at Springwood in 1902 predating the Gordon exercise. Even more amazing was the Commissioners' acquiescence to the construction of ramps. No doubt the naming of the street adjoining the rail corridor on the western side, Wade Lane, was a thank you to Premier Wade's persuasion of the Commissioners to build something sought by the local community. The ramps were set on a gradient of one in eight, which became the standard gradient for the next 50 years.



For the first time since the footbridge was erected in 1910, the steelwork of the substructure has received a coating of other than micaceous oxide. With the creation of CityRail in 1989, every railway station in the State was upgraded, including Gordon station. The balustrades of

⁴⁸ J. Harvey, *Gordon Station*, unpublished paper, 2003, p. 4.

the stepways have been covered with white paint. What a difference the CityRail colour scheme made to the rusting steelwork. The date is 20th August 2005.

THE OVERHEAD BOOKING OFFICE 1910

1. THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF OVERHEAD STRUCTURES

It was Chief Commissioner, E.M.G. Eddy, who introduced the concept of placing ticket offices above and below platforms. Between 1890 and 1892, overhead booking offices were approved at eight locations.⁴⁹ Six were built.⁵⁰ Of those built, four had timber walls and two had brick.⁵¹ Three survive – at Waverton, Redfern and Newtown. Some had gabled roofs and some with hipped roofs.

After 1892, there was a gap of eight years until the next group of overhead structures was approved. In the history of overhead booking offices, a most significant event occurred in 1900 when a very large overhead booking and parcels office was approved for Strathfield. It measured 120 feet by about 20 feet. It was constructed in brick but there was a significant structural problem. The substructure could not bear the weight of the superstructure. Although the substructure was strengthened, it became the last brick overhead facility until 1979, with one exception.⁵² It seems that the Railway engineers were not confident about the adequacy of the supporting steelwork to carry the weight of the brickwork.

The Strathfield building introduced one of the hallmark design features of overhead ticket and parcels offices. The ends of the roof were terminated in what was called a Dutch gable. This was a design where a hipped roof was terminated about two feet from the roof ridge from where there was a vertical section covered in timber louvres that allowed ventilation of the ceiling cavity. The style of the gable is also known as a gambrel roof, a broken hip roof and a gable-on-hip roof. The gable part often was formed of louvres and often used to vent the ceiling cavity and toilet pavilions. From 1900 for the next 30 years, the Dutch gable became the frequently-used, but not the exclusive, roof form until 1929 when the vertical component was eliminated and simple hipped roofs became the norm.

Between 1900 and 1910, nine overhead facilities were approved, including those at Chatswood (measuring 12 feet square in 1901) and at Hornsby (in 1909). They found department popularity on stations with multiple tracks, as at Gordon.

⁴⁹ These were at Katoomba, Erskineville (both in 1890), Newtown, Redfern, Croydon (all in 1891), Homebush, Waverton and Milsons Point (all in 1892).

⁵⁰ Those at Katoomba and Croydon were not built.

⁵¹ The brick versions survive at Newtown and Redfern.

⁵² The exception was the booking and parcels office at North Sydney in 1931. The structure at North Sydney was not built by the New South Wales Railways but by the Metropolitan Construction Branch of the Department of Public Works under the leadership of J.C.C. Bradfield.

2. THE GORDON OVERHEAD TICKET AND PARCELS BUILDING

The platform building and the footbridge were completed before construction commenced on the overhead building.⁵³

Originally, the overhead booking office was to be located on the southern side of the footbridge, according to two plans issued in 1909.⁵⁴ By the time the Department issued the architectural plan for the overhead booking office in September 1910, the Department decided to relocate the booking office to the northern side of the footbridge, where it is positioned today.



*The above photograph, taken in 1910, shows either people walking on the footbridge or, possibly, workers undertaking the first signs of construction of the overhead booking and parcels office. The original timber privacy screen covers the entrance/exit of the male toilet. The station nameboard on the extreme left displays white letters on a black background, which was the standard, pre-1914 colour arrangement. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 439 Ku-ring-gai Library Local History Collection.*

The platform building, which contained both ticket and parcels offices, had been in operation for over 15 months when the Railway Department decided to erect a timber framed parcels and ticket office on the overhead steel bridge. The external walls were covered with horizontally set weatherboards. The transverse Dutch gable roof extended six feet on the footbridge side to provide cover against inclement weather

⁵³ Photograph No. 439, taken in 1910, in the Ku-ring-gai Shire Library local history collection shows the completed platform building and footbridge without the building.

⁵⁴ This refers to the plan for the lamp room dated 30th June 1909 and another plan for “alterations” dated 2nd August 1909.

for people standing at the three ticket windows. The design consisted of a simple rectangle with both end walls extended six feet to act as supports for the extended roof. Platform buildings were traditionally narrow affairs and so too were overhead booking and parcels offices. They were always longer than wider. The example at Gordon was 45 feet long – about average. The internal space was 13 feet wide. The area covering the ticket windows, which was officially labelled a ‘covered lobby’, was six feet wide.

The material covering the roof was significant. James Hardie & Company imported eight crates of asbestos cement roof slates in the early 20th century. These were shipped to Melbourne, where they were to be used for “railway linesmen’s huts”. “Eternit” was one European names for the product. “Fibrolite” became an Australian name.

The first use of asbestos cement sheets on the New South Wales Railways was in 1905 where the roofs of the Clyde and Wellington locomotive sheds were re-sheeted in what were called fibro cement tiles.⁵⁵ Locomotive historian, Ray Love, writes that “the fibro-cement tiles were noted (on the plan) as supplied by agents, James Hardie & Co., No. 11 Macquarie Place, Sydney, grey in colour, closely trimmed round”.⁵⁶

The first use of asbestos cement tiles for a station building was on the roof of the overhead booking office at Gordon in 1910. By 1914, there were a dozen importers of asbestos cement sheets and tiles into Australia and the use of the product on railway buildings accelerated.⁵⁷ Business was booming for James Hardie so much so that a siding on the Sandown branch line opened in 1916 known as the Asbestos Slate and Sheet Manufacturing Siding, which was later renamed Hardies Asbestos Siding.⁵⁸

Roughcast concrete was applied to each of the three gables on the overhead building at Gordon. The roof ridge was covered with terracotta tiles and the ridge was terminated with small terracotta finials. Each of three ticket windows was protected with a “crush barrier” in front of it. These were intended to stop people running directly to the ticket windows. This was standard, departmental practice. Why three ticket windows? One was everyday single and return tickets. The second was for weekly and seasonal tickets and country travel bookings and the third was opened for a limited time on Monday mornings for the sale weekly tickets. The allocation of three ticket windows suggested a reasonable volume of business.

There was only one door in the structure located towards the centre in the wall facing the footbridge. It served a counter where the public deposited or collected parcels. A part of the counter could be raised to permit the passage of staff. A fuel stove was located in one corner with a flue that penetrated the western wall. No toilets were

⁵⁵ R. D. Love, “The Steam Locomotive Depots in NSW – The Old Suburban depots of Sydney”, *Byways of Steam* 25, Matraville, Eveleigh Press, 2006, pp. 49 & 56.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁷ C. Pickett, *The Fibro Frontier*, Sydney, Powerhouse Publishing, 1997, p. 10.

⁵⁸ J. Casey, “The Sandown Line”, *Roundhouse*, Summer 2025, p. 22.

provided with staff having to race down the stepway to the platform facility. In later years, a hand washbasin was fitted and male staff would be required to urinate in that container if there was a long line of passengers wanting to purchase tickets. It was not until 1992 that a staff toilet was installed in the booking office.

A wall-mounted memorial is affixed to the eastern wall of the facility. The present location is its third position.



Gordon station has had two major upgradings within a period of 12 years. In the 1970s, Lawrence Drycleaning had erected a business on the western side of the overhead booking office and CityRail added a second retail entity in the early 1990s on the eastern side of the booking office. The image on the left, taken on 13th March 2003, shows the 1992 additional concession on the left. At that time, another concession operated in the former general waiting room in the platform Nos. 2 and 3 building selling flowers. On the right is the overhead booking office showing the alterations carried out in 2005. The space occupied by the Lawrence Drycleaning business was required for the lift to platform Nos. 2 and 3 but the concession on the eastern side remained. The florist on the platform no longer operates. The right image was taken on 20th August 2005.

THE LAMP ROOM

The storage of kerosene for the lighting of platform and signal lights was often allocated a separate structure. In rural areas, especially smaller stations, the structures would be timber framed with walls sheeted with corrugated iron. By 1910, the Railway Department had been adopted a policy of providing superior structures in Sydney and Newcastle than elsewhere. With that policy in mind, the Department issued a plan on 30th June 1909 for the construction of a small lamp room off the southern end of the platform. It measured ten feet by eight feet internal with nine inch solid brick walls. It had a simple gabled roof covered with corrugated iron sheets. Inside, there was a shelf covered with zinc sheeting to facilitate the transfer of kerosene from bulk containers to the lamps.



The above photograph was taken before 1992 when the single deck suburban carriages were removed from service. On 30th June 1909, a plan was issued for a brick lamp room to be located immediately off the southern end of the platform. In this photograph, the brick lamp room is shown on the left. Behind it is a relay hut that was constructed in 1927 in conjunction with track electrification.

THE SIGNAL BOX

The walls of the platform building were erected by the staff of the Engineer for Existing Lines whereas the dwarf walls of the signal box were constructed by the staff of the Signal Engineer. What is the easiest way to tell the difference? Look at the officially named “mats” outside the adjoining doors. On the left is the main building and, on the right, the door into the signal box.





Dr Bob Taaffe, interlocking and signal box historian, has written the history of the Gordon signal box. The roof of the platform building was extended when built to protect the exiting interlocking frame. Bob writes that the 20 feet 8 inch long box opened on 24th October 1909 and the interlocking machine at that time consisted of 16 lever rocker frame. He adds that the initial frame was replaced in conjunction with track duplication in 1909 by a 30 lever machine made by McKenzie and Holland, being known as a 6A pattern. At the time of electrification in 1928, official documents indicate that the machine comprised 32 levers. In February 1948, this machine was replaced by a 28 lever machine, coded as a NSW Railways Type A model and it is this machine that was is still in situ in the signal box.⁵⁹ In March 1927, authorisation was given to the enclosure of the interlocking frame with dwarf brick walls and extensive glazing.⁶⁰ The dwarf brick walls are 28 inches high. The box closed on 8th October 1994. An interesting detail is also shown in the image. Gordon station is located on a gradient of 1 in 170 against trains proceeding to Hornsby. In other words, the buildings are not set on flat ground but on a slope where the south end of the station is at a lower height than the northern end. This change in altitude can be observed in the number of courses of brickwork forming the plinth at the base of the dwarf wall of the signal box. At the northern end of the signal box, the plinth is formed by only one course of bricks. This contrasts with the opposing end of the signal box, adjacent to the green door, where the plinth is formed by two courses of bricks.
SOURCE: Google.

There is an interpretive plaque at the bottom of the steps on the eastern side of the railway corridor. It tells a little about the history of the station but contains one error. It

⁵⁹ R. T. Taaffe, *Signal Boxes of New South Wales Railways and Tramways*. Vol. 4, Hobart, Taaffe Press, 2020, p. 179 and email from Dr Bob Taaffe on 21st January 2025.

⁶⁰ SRA, *Gordon Signal Box Open Day 20th April 1997*, no pag.

states that the signal box was “integrated” into the construction of the 1909 platform building. That was not the case. Only the roof was provided in 1909.



*When the above photograph was taken, the interlocking frame had 28 levers. The photograph dates from 7th October 1994 – the day before the signal box closed. All levers shown in the photograph are in the normal or ‘on’ position, meaning that all signals show a stop indication. The red levers operate signals. The black levers manipulate points and the blue lever allows the release of a key to unlock a subsidiary interlocking frame or lever or a facing point lock. The white levers indicate that the lever is spare. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 0739762 ARHS Railway Archives*



The image taker is standing in the signal box in 2025 and is looking towards platform No. 3. The image highlights in the difference in fabric between the two parts of the structure. On the left is the end of the brick wall of 1909 building and shows the rendered string course around the end of the building. The wall itself was not rendered because it was formerly exposed, face brickwork. That was the work of the then Permanent Way Branch. When the green light was given for the interlocking frame to be enclosed, the work was performed by the staff of the Signal Engineer. He did not render the now internal end wall and enclosed the walls above the windows with vertical timber boards. The only nice feature was the use of small, corrugated iron sheets to cover the ceiling.

THE TRACTION SUB-STATION 1927

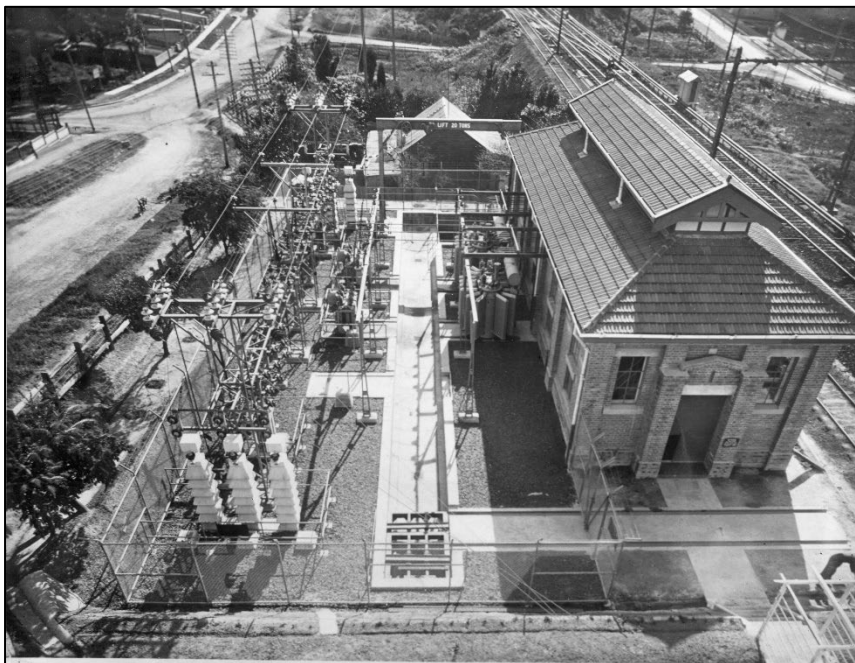
The New South Wales Railways intended that the North Shore would be the first line to be electrified, in view of the considerable expense the organisation incurred in frequently replacing brake shoes on locomotives and carriages. Because not all the infrastructure had not been altered to accommodate the wider loading gauge of electric carriages on the line, the Railways went ahead and electrified the line between Central Electric and Oatley as the initial project.

The Railway Department issued a plan on 30th July 1926 for a traction sub-station. It was 66 feet by 26 feet external. The cavity brick walls were 17 feet tall. For a purely industrial building without any physical link to the station area, the structure was beautifully designed with engaged piers along the external walls and a delightful canopy covering the entrance, which incorporated second-hand 80 lbs. rail as a lintel. The building was a statement of modern materials, including a terracotta tiled roof, Fibrolite gutters, steel window frames and a roller shutter door complete with a wicket (i.e. a small door) three feet six inches by two feet three inches to allow pedestrian passage without the need to open the large roller door. The most interesting material was the use of terracotta roof tiles. These were used extremely rarely for station buildings whereas every electrical sub-station utilised them. How come? Because the Electrical Branch held the budget, not the Way and Works Branch.

The Gordon facility was one of 15 similar buildings, all designed in a similar fashion between 1926 and 1932.⁶¹ Size was the only major variant.

Conservation Architect, Paul Davies, undertook a heritage impact statement of the Gordon traction substation.⁶² He writes that the substation was constructed in 1927 and involved a trial installation of a new type of transformer, known as a mercury vapour arc rectifier. Because the design was more compact than rotary equipment used elsewhere, the building at Gordon was, accordingly, smaller than other substations.

The sub-station was taken out of service sometime in the 1980s. The structure was subsequently leased to the Chalmers Bus Company, which used the site as a bus depot and the building as the office. Their lease of the property ceased in late 1997. In May 1998, the interior of the structure was largely destroyed by fire and the building was subsequently demolished. Chalmers Bus Company no longer exists.



*The photographer is looking north on 8th July 1937. All traction substations were designed with the same brick walls, broken hipped roofs covered by terracotta tiles and a ventilator sitting on the full length of the ridge of the roof. Terracotta finials were placed on each gable. Finials were not specified in the plans. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 305744 ARHS Railway Archives*

⁶¹ The 15 substations were located at Prince Alfred Sidings (1926), Meeks Road (1926), Hurstville (1926), Sutherland (1926), Belmore (1926), St Leonards (1927), Gordon (1927), Hornsby (1927), Lewisham (1928), Strathfield (1928), Epping (1929), Granville (1929), Cabramatta (1929), Sefton (1929) and Argyle, i.e. the southern approach to the Sydney Harbour Bridge (1932).

⁶² P. Davies, *Gordon Sub-station Heritage Impact Statement*, Unpublished Report, 1999, no pag.

PART 5

FOUR LINES (NEARLY) AND FOUR PLATFORMS (NEARLY) - THE RAIL JUNCTION TO THE BEACH 1926

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works delivered its report in 1926 on a proposed railway three miles in length from Gordon railway station to Narrabeen on the coast. The report of the Committee was a statement that displayed the power of the Railway Commissioners. The project had been first raised 1911 but the views of the Railway Department were not sought at that time. It was not until 1920 that the Department was asked about the connection between the North Shore line and the coast but the matter was not referred to the Standing Committee until 1922. The Commissioners declined to furnish the statutory report in the stated time and the matter was allowed to rest. No one seemed to complain that the Commissioners had failed to meet a legal obligation.

The Commissioners' report was received by State Parliament in November, 1923, with the Commissioner showing the usual slow response to do anything, even to reply to Parliament. The Commissioners did not support the project saying that "they cannot advise the expenditure of money on public works for this purpose (i.e. tourist traffic) in view of the present financial position of the State".⁶³ They referred to the "heavy expenditure" related to work on the City Railway (especially the underground section), track electrification, line quadruplication and sextuplication and the Sydney Harbour Bridge.⁶⁴ Author, Robert Lee, comments that financial responsibility for the Sydney Harbour Bridge was transferred from the Railways to the Main Roads Board in 1926 in order to improve railway finances by shifting the Bridge construction expenses elsewhere.⁶⁵ Work on the City Railway and the Harbour Bridge was seen as an opportunity to relieve unemployment.

They also stated their general view about new suburban lines and that was that there should be the engagement of the existing opportunities for residential development on existing lines before new lines were proposed. In this instance, they specifically referred to the Sydney-Parramatta section, the Illawarra and the Strathfield-Hornsby lines. Why did the Commissioners not include the North Shore railway? Good question!

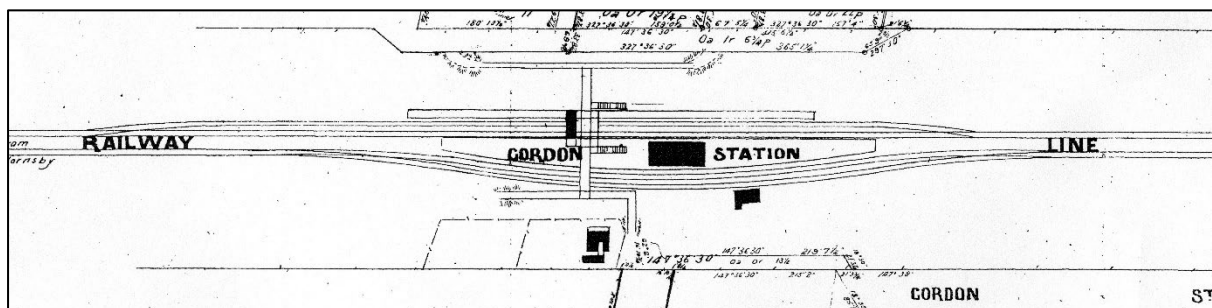
⁶³ NSW, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, *Report together with minutes of evidence relating to the Proposed Railway from Gordon to Narrabeen*, Sydney, Government Printer, 1926, p. vi.

⁶⁴ NSW, *Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works – Proposed Railway from Gordon to Narrabeen*, 1926, p. 2.

⁶⁵ R. Lee, *Transport*, University of NSW Press, 2010, p. 238.

In the report by the Parliamentary Public Works Committee dated 1st November 1926 for the proposed railway from Gordon to Narrabeen, the Railway Commissioners apportioned 2.9% of the estimated total construction cost to platforms and buildings. This low percentage allocated to stations indicates that only the most primitive arrangements were envisaged and suggests that the design of platform buildings was not important to the Railway Department. The number of proposed stations was not stated but it was mentioned that the ratio of building costs was roughly double the platform cost.⁶⁶

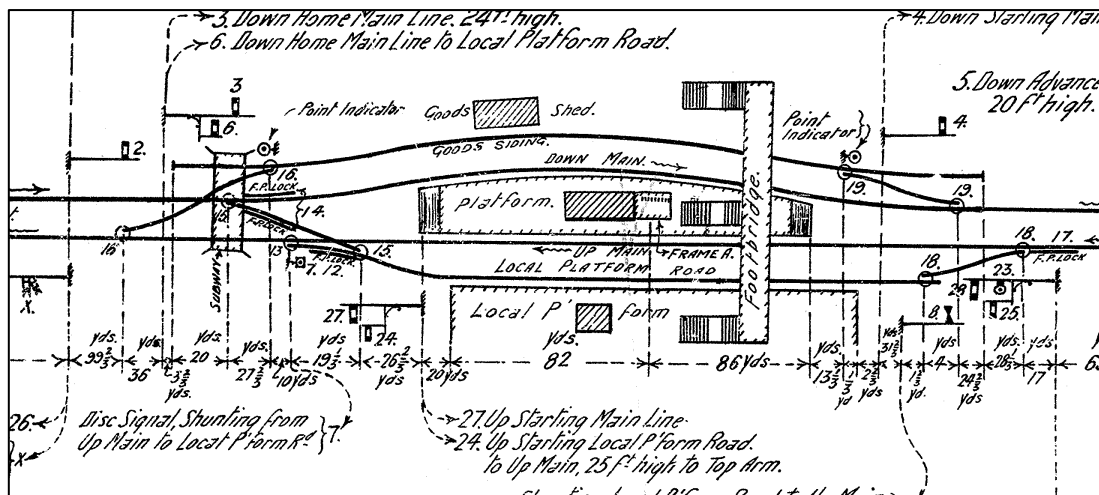
Don Hagarty, a senior Railway engineer who was the last occupant of the position of Chief Civil Engineer (in an acting capacity) commented to Stephen Buck that earthworks were carried out at Gordon in 1908 supposedly for a fourth platform in readiness for the authorisation of the branch line to Narrabeen.⁶⁷ Don resided nearby at St. Ives. That statement appears to conflict with the negative attitude about later proposals for a branch line to the sea. However, the earthworks may have been related to a proposal to provide a fourth track through the station. Albert Fewtrell, who later became the Chief Civil Engineer, prepared a plan on 2nd June 1909 for that additional track on the western side of the existing Down Main line. No platform was shown on the plan to serve the additional line and, accordingly, the purpose may have been to provide a refuge loop or the re-arrangement of the goods siding into a loop. A similar plan for an additional track through the station was issued in 1910. Nothing came of the proposal for an additional running line.



The above 1910 plan shows four tracks running through the station. It is a little puzzling. The plan shows the outline of the goods shed adjacent to the additional track. Was the intention to carry out a simple redesign of the goods yard? If so, there was no crossover to allow a southbound goods train to gain access to the goods siding, thus requiring all goods vehicles for Gordon to be shunted only by trains heading north. May be the plan shows just one option considered following the need to relocate the goods shed from its original position. Was the fourth track a refuge loop to allow one train to be overtaken by another train, say a goods train refuged to allow a passenger train to pass? Whatever the case, this plan was not implemented.

⁶⁶ NSW, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works – Proposed Railway from Gordon to Narrabeen, 1926, p. 8.

⁶⁷ Advice from Stephen Buck by email on 24th July 2011.



On 19th October 1909, the Interlocking Engineer issued the above track diagram for Gordon station. Note that the plan shows access to the goods siding from both north and southbound goods trains – a design that was standard New South Wales practice. Compare the 1909 plan above with the preceding 1910 track plan. It is hard to know what to think about the fourth track in the 1910 track diagram.

The 1920s was not the end of thoughts about track quadruplication. In January 2003, CityRail planners issued a plan entitled "Quadruplication – Interim and Future". The dreaming continued. It envisaged two island platforms connected by a new overhead concourse located in the centre of the platforms. It would involve the demolition of all existing buildings. Given the passion and strength of the local heritage campaigners, it is little wonder the plan went nowhere.

PART 6

STATION GARDENS AND BEAUTIFICATION

1. NOMENCLATURE

Growing and managing vegetation on railway property came under two headings – gardening and beautification. The former was undertaken by Railway staff and the latter by non-Railway staff. The land identified for beautification was leased to local government authorities and it was these councils that were responsible for maintenance of the property.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATION GARDENS

Some station staff have always been interested in gardening and have extended their hobby to their local work place. Gardening at stations got a big boost when Chief Commissioner Eddy suggested utilising gardens to increase the visual experience of waiting passengers. They also provided a distraction from the extent of soot and

smoke that covered every structure on the railway system. Two staff members had been employed since 1890 to make garden plots and implement other measures to make stations more attractive. The idea was an immediate success. That prompted the Railway Institute, which was the staff welfare branch of the Department, to suggest in October 1892 that the Commissioners awarded prizes for the best kept gardens at railway stations.⁶⁸ Only two stations were mentioned that possessed pretty gardens, these being Gosford and Bellambi.

In July 1894, the Railway Institute again promoted, saying:

“The desirability of improving the surroundings of railway stations wherever possible, by utilising station grounds and forming flower gardens thereon. Since the matter was first mooted, a number of gardens had been formed and planted with ornamental shrubs and flowers, and their appearance had added considerably to the attractiveness of the stations, besides which they are much appreciated by the travelling public, and we trust that further efforts will be made by the staff, and gardens extended all stations where there is any available land suitable for the purpose”.⁶⁹

It would take another five years before the Commissioners commenced an annual garden competition. Nevertheless, the Railway Institute set out those stations on the railway system that had gardens in 1894. These were:

METROPOLITAN AREA

ILLAWARRA LINE: Rockdale, Kogarah & Hurstville,

WESTERN LINE: Lewisham, Burwood, Croydon & Strathfield

SOUTHERN LINE: Merrylands, Liverpool, Granville & Campbelltown

SOUTHERN DISTRICT: Menangle, Balmoral, Colo Vale, Mittagong, Bowral, Moss Vale, Yass Junction, Junee, Wagga Wagga & Albury

WESTERN DISTRICT: Springwood, Blackheath, EskBank, Wallerawang, Brewongle, George’s Plains, Orange, Molong & Windsor

NORTHERN DISTRICT: Gosford, Newcastle, Waratah & West Maitland

SOUTH COAST: Bellambi & Nowra⁷⁰

The absence of stations on the North Shore line is notable.

⁶⁸ *New South Wales Railway Budget*, October, 1892, p. 14.

⁶⁹ *New South Wales Railway Budget*, 17th July 1894, p. 200.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The Railway Commissioners were uninterested in the idea until 1899, when they commenced an annual garden competition.

It was not until 1923 that the gardens at Gordon station became noteworthy. In that year, the Sydney press spotted the existence of gardens at some stations and reportedly positively on their visual impact. At the time, the Head Gardener of the Railway Department was working at Gordon station with the objective “to make Gordon station one of the most attractive in the metropolitan area”.⁷¹

3. STATION BEAUTIFICATION

The idea of community involvement in the establishment and maintenance of gardens popped up in the early 1920s and the evidence indicates that Hornsby was the first location for a beautification scheme on both sides of the line at the station. The arrangement of the gardens and paths was to be decided by the local “Beautification Committee” and the Departmental Gardener. The Commissioners forwarded plans in June 1925 to Hornsby Shire Council with a question that, if the Railway Department paid for the construction, would the Hornsby Chamber of Commerce maintain the gardens. The Chamber replied affirmatively.⁷² The concept took off quickly at other stations.



⁷¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18th January 1923, p. 7.

⁷² *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 19th June, 1925, p. 6.

*The foregoing photograph shows the beautification scheme in 1943 that had been developed adjacent to Werona Avenue on the eastern side of the railway lines. The continued management of the gardens through the Depression in the 1930s and the impact of World War 2 in the 1940s stands as a testament to the strength of the local community. It is obvious that the shrubs and trees do much to hide the unattractive steelwork that forms the substructure for the footbridge. The roof of the footbridge building is covered with asbestos cement slates with the ridges enclosed in bespoke "V" shaped terracotta tiles. Terracotta finials terminate the ridges. **SOURCE:** Photograph No. 0891676 ARHS Railway Archives.*

In 1925, one Sydney newspaper acknowledged that some stations had been beautified but noted, in these instances, that the work was done due to the passion of the local staff rather than any departmental policy. Roseville station was highlighted as an exemplar because of the flowers and trees planted nearby. Killara station was also cited as another beautiful garden, as were Wahroonga, Turramurra, Lindfield and Gordon. The *Herald* argued that more stations required gardens and suggested that each station could specialise in a particular type of plant. The *Herald* was not the only newspaper to comment on the role of station gardens as an agent to make stations more attractive. The *Evening News* in 1925 referred to the work of volunteers on the North Shore station gardens, arguing that there should be a "uniform scheme in which the Railway authorities will help."⁷³

At Gordon, a beautification scheme was prepared in 1933 for the on the northbound side at the end of St. Johns Avenue. It required the demolition of one of two 1 in 8 ramps on that side of the line. Two station access proposals were prepared. One involved the provision of a new ramp straight from footbridge and the second provided for the retention of the existing set of steps. Nothing happened, it appears, on the western side of the line but the contrary occurred on the eastern side of the rail corridor.

A correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* made the following comment at the end of World War 2: "Most of the North Shore line stations, such as Roseville, Killara, and Gordon, are maintained by Kuring-gai Council employees. Manpower shortages have dimmed their beauty, but a start has been made with their refurbishing".⁷⁴

⁷³ *Evening News*, 5th March 1925, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27th September 1945, p. 2.

PART 7

IMPROVEMENTS BETWEEN 1930 AND 1992

From 1930, New South Wales governments under-funded the railway system and very little work was undertaken on the system as a whole, including stations.

NEW FLOOR IN FEMALE TOILET 1934

The existing timber floor at Gordon in the female toilet was replaced in 1934 with a four inch thick concrete floor. Clearly, there were some very heavy women using the facility. It was laid on a base of locomotive ashes. New closets were also provided.

CONNECTION TO LOCAL SEWERAGE SYSTEM 1937

Plans were issued on 15th June 1937 for the connection of the station to the local sewerage network.

NEWSAGENCY ON FOOTBRIDGE 1938

The New South Wales Bookstall Company opened a newsagency and bookstall on the western end of the overhead booking office in 1938. It was tiny, measuring ten feet by eight feet. The installation of the facility required the permanent closure of the ticket window at the western end and the relocation of the World War 1 honour board. In 1958, the Company was sold and, possibly, the newsagency closed at Gordon after that date. The agency had to be closed to make room for Lawrence Drycleaning outlet, the opening date for which is unknown.

ERECTION OF BARRIERS ON THE FOOTBRIDGE TO FACILITATE THE COLLECTION F TICKETS 1942

New ticket barriers on the overhead concourse were installed in 1942 to reduce the width of the opening for people proceeding from the platforms. This allowed the station staff to stand at the narrower opening in the dividing fence between the paid and unpaid areas and to collect used tickets more effectively.

FLOOR REPLACEMENT IN THE GENERAL WAITING ROOM 1970s

It is not surprising that the hardwood flooring in the general waiting room had to be replaced. It sat very close to the ground with minimal ventilation. Although no plans are available to pinpoint a date, the floor product sets the timing.



The above image, taken on 13th March 2003, shows the selection of inappropriate, glazed floor tiles in the general waiting room at Gordon. These were installed in the 1970s at many stations in an effort to improve the environment of the station. The action backfired and the tiles act as a reminder of what not to do at a heritage-listed station. The original fixed seating installed in 1909 has been removed. While its replacement is a genuine Railway product (probably from Gordon), it was intended for use on platforms and not internal areas. The red paint was applied in the early 1990s when CityRail upgraded the station for the first time. Note the moulded dado line around the walls.

REPLACEMENT OF TRADITIONAL PLATFORM SEATS 1985

In August 1985, the State Rail Authority approved the replacement of the traditional seats on all platforms. The green platform seats were replaced on the three platforms with 13 grey affairs with a blue stripe on which the station name was expressed. The round-top rubbish bins, with sprung lids, were replaced with open-top, silver coloured bins. As well, all authentic large timber station nameboards, circle-and-bar nameboards and other signs dating from 1909 and the 1920s were replaced with new, dark blue signage.

The 1985 seats, bins and signs would not last long. They themselves were replaced in 1992.

PART 8 THE STATION UPGRADES 1992 AND 2005

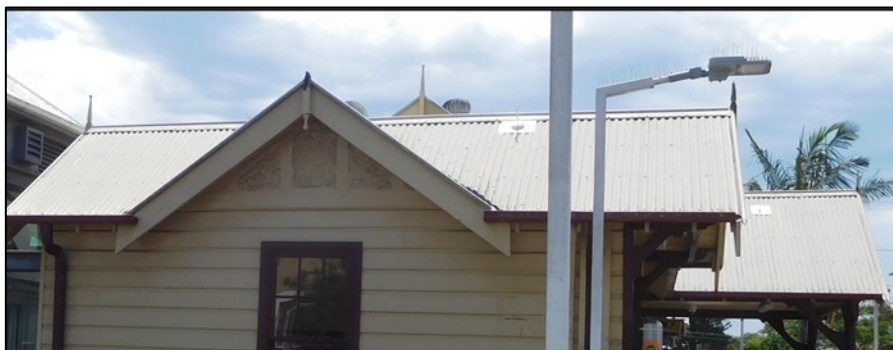
THE FIRST STATION UPGRADING 1992

CityRail Architects had announced in 1989 that it intended to upgrade every station within the CityRail network. It was in 1992 that it was Gordon's turn. All stations were to receive the new corporate colours of red and white. Red and white paints were applied to all the replacement platform seats, some with a white strip expressing the

station name and others just in universal red. There was no hard and fast rule about what other station elements were to be painted red, in addition to red rubbish bins. At Gordon, the lamp posts were painted red, as was the full length of the fence at the rear of platform No. 1 as well as the fences at the ends of platform Nos. 2 and 3. The balustrades on the overbridge and stepways were painted white – a feature applied to most other stations. CityRail also installed three-level arrival and departure signs on all the platforms – these indicating the station name. They were placed on an angle so that passengers in trains could more easily read the signs. Three level nameboards first appeared in 1979 with the opening of the Eastern Suburbs Railway.

Artarmon had been chosen in 1989 as the prototype station for the new red and white colour palette. It featured the use of red paint for virtually every item within reach of human hands. The red paint was not restricted to new elements, such as the long platform canopy. The existing platform indicator boards which displayed details of the next trains were also painted red. With the addition of brightly coloured red paint on virtually every metal, structural item on the station, Artarmon, Gordon and all other similarly treated stations were able to be seen by the public vividly and widely from either side of the tracks and, hence, transfer a message from the railway administration to the general public that an effort was being made to brighten station areas. Placing the choice of colours aside, the Greiner Coalition Government and CityRail should be congratulated for their policy to rejuvenate every railway station.

CityRail issued plans on 22nd July 1992 to repair some aspects of the overhead booking building at Gordon – parcels traffic had ceased in 1989. The original asbestos cement roof slates had been earlier replaced with dark grey coloured corrugated iron sheets but the replacement was itself replaced with lighter coloured sheets of similar profile. A new timber floor was positioned on top of the original floor. The roofscape was fundamentally altered by the addition of attached pavilions at each end. At least stucco was applied to the two new gables (over the concessions) to replicate the roughcast on the original gable facing the stepways. The exposed roof rafters were retained at the eaves. Gone was the peaceful simplicity of the unencumbered roof; now the roof was complex with the impossibility to determine the original roof shape.



Even the white cockatoos at Gordon have an eye for inappropriate conservation practice. The foregoing picture shows five timber finials on the gables, erected in 1993 as part of the “upgrade”. Of those five, the cockatoos have already munched their way through four of them as at 22nd January 2025.

Other repairs were made. The timber walls at both ends of the overhead building were extended to allow the construction of two concessions at the eastern end and an enlarged concession at the western end. The World War 1 honour board was again relocated to allow for the construction of the western end concession. Apart from the end extensions, the other work was carried out mostly with sensitivity to the structure’s heritage values.

On platform Nos. 2 and 3, the privacy screen covering the entrance/exit to the male toilet was removed. It was not the original screen, which had been removed some years earlier. Then, a door was fitted to the toilet entrance and it was locked forever. At the same time, the female toilet on the same platform was locked. The alternative provided by CityRail was a single, unisex, “family” toilet on the footbridge. Commuters would have been shocked to see that one uni sex toilet was to provide a service for the hundreds, possibly thousands, of children and adults that used the station each day. The sole toilet stands as an identifier of the fight in 1993 that occurred between CityRail, which endeavoured to implement a no toilet policy, and the Commuter Council of New South Wales. It was the work primarily of the Chairman of the Council, Kevin Parrish, who was ardent in his support for commuters and a wise political strategist. When he realised that CityRail was intending to provide zero toilets at stations, he went to the Minister for Transport and advocated the abandonment of the no toilet policy. He won. While only one toilet is grossly insufficient for the passenger demand at Gordon, the single toilet tells the story about the provision of adequate toilet facilities across the then CityRail system.

Sydney Trains realised after a period of nearly 30 years that the sole toilet at Gordon was inadequate for the number of passengers using the station. A plan was in hand in 2020 to provide a second toilet but, when the Covid-19 epidemic struck, no physical work was possible on the project. In the interim, Kur-ring-gai Council has built three uni sex toilets on its property at the bottom of the steps and ramps on the western side of the corridor. It is yet to be seen whether Sydney Trains will proceed with its original plan to increase the number of toilets from one to two.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Gordon is not the only station where Sydney Trains have failed to provide sufficient public toilets. A similar case exists at Shellharbour Junction station where the then Minister for Transport, Gladys Berejiklian, refused to fund one uni sex public toilet at the new station and Shellharbour Council stepped in to provide a public facility.



This 1993 photograph shows the alterations at the eastern end for the establishment of a new concession (i.e. shop). At this time, CityRail was under much pressure from government to maximise retail revenue at railway stations and it was mandatory that additional shop space be provided when station upgrades were being undertaken. The manual train indicator boards are visible over the head of the man with the red bag. In front of the same person is the red public telephone. The World War 1 honour board is in its second position. Note the ornamental ends to the exposed roof rafters. Perhaps the most outstanding feature is the three travellers waiting to purchase tickets. They are all neatly attired in suits – a form of dress not seen often at stations in 2025.

PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF CANOPIES ON OVERBRIDGE, STEPWAYS AND PLATFORMS 1998

The construction of all-weather cover between the property boundaries at stations was a policy actively implemented throughout the 1990s and continues to be executed. In 1998, CityRail intended to erect steel canopies from the overhead booking office to each side of the railway corridor and down the stepways to the existing platform buildings.

Once again, the pressure from the local community stopped that incursion of the heritage values of the station precinct.

THE INSTALLATION OF CCTV 2000

In the years 2000 and 2001, CityRail implemented a massive programme to install multiple CCTV cameras at every one of the 307 stations in the CityRail network. Even at those stations where cameras were already installed, CityRail increased the number

of cameras. Stage 1 of the project was the platform area, which was implemented in 2000 and Stage 2 involved cameras in the commuter car parking areas in 2001.

THE SECOND STATION UPGRADING 2004

Gordon was a fairly peaceful suburb but there was an active residential interest in all things historical and heritage. There was no substantial protest at the change on the concourse building in 1992 but Hell arrived on CityRail's doorstep a decade later when CityRail called tenders for the provision of lifts to the platforms.⁷⁶



This 20th August 2005 picture shows that the overhead ticket office had been altered. An additional concession has been built on the eastern side. A unisex toilet has been provided. Two new doors have been inserted into the wall. A recess has been fitted to allow the insertion of a ticket vending machine and a security screen fitted to the ticket window. This part of the structure was known officially as the ticket lobby and the roofing was provided to act as a shelter from weather events. Note how the transverse gable extends from the main roof and stops in line with the white painted balustrade on the left. At this time, there were three concessions on the overbridge – one at each end and one towards the centre of the structure in regard to which a “For Lease” sign can be faintly observed over the right shoulder of the man clutching the Daily Telegraph newspaper. Originally, the white painted balustrade at the extreme right side continued towards the camera, leaving only a small gap to allow the staff to collect tickets.

⁷⁶ *Railway Digest*, February 2004, p. 12.



By 4th December 2024, the station has, once again, been painted. The ticket vending machine is gone, due to the introduction of Opal cards, but the recess is still visible in the wall. A hub, which is the official name for the white coloured cabinet, has been installed. The hub houses a computer that indicates the arrival times of trains but is only accessible to staff.

Sue Haertsch Planning, a private consulting organisation, had prepared an environmental impact statement in relation to CityRail's intention to provide what it was called an "easy access upgrade". The term involved the provision of access for disabled people either by lifts or ramps between platforms and adjacent public road systems. Ku-ring-gai Council received the document in late October 2003. About the same time, the *North Shore Times* newspaper published an article about the proposed \$3 billion upgrade to Gordon station.⁷⁷ Now everyone was aware of the proposed installation of the lifts.

Zeny Edwards, the Chairwoman of the Heritage Advisory Committee to Ku-ring-gai Council, got wind of the proposal in early November 2003 by CityRail to provide easy access lifts at Gordon station. The lifts were to be placed on the southern side of the existing footbridge blocking all uninterrupted views from the platforms of the heritage-listed timber booking office adjacent to the footbridge. Zeny became aware of the good outcome that resulted from strong community action in the case of a proposal to provide lifts at Summer Hill in 2002. She immediately organised a submission to Council's Heritage Committee, which was approved. While the Rail Infrastructure Corporation, the then construction entity for structures, had indicated to Council that it was going to submit a Development Application for the installation of lifts. No plans were available at that time to the public.

⁷⁷ *North Shore Times*, 31st October 2003, p. 6.



*This image from the Daily Telegraph newspaper shows members of the local community expressing their concern at the plans in 2004 to install lifts. Their effort demonstrated that a well-organised local campaign formed of passionate, skilled people, together with the support of local government and other community groups, can achieve their goal. **SOURCE:** Google.*

The local community at Gordon utilised the existing structure of the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society and commenced a campaign of opposition to the proposal. Jennifer Harvey was heavily involved in the Society and never stopped in her desire to see an improved design outcome. In December 2003, a newly formed organisation was established called *Retain Our Australian Rail Heritage*, known as *ROAR* in the shortened version. The group prepared dodgers, wrote numerous letters, and made personal representations to State Members of Parliament and to the officers of the Heritage Council of New South Wales. ROAR sent 27 letters to the Minister for Transport. Zeny Edwards advocated strongly to Council the degradation of heritage values with CityRail's proposal. Janine Kitson was also a key campaigner as a Councillor of Ku-ring-gai Shire Council. The *North Shore Times* newspaper in January 2004 reported the tussle between the local community and CityRail with the heading, "Battlelines Drawn on Station Plans".⁷⁸

By the time the project came before the Heritage Council for approval, its members were already fully aware of the issues. ROAR argued that the initial proposal was unsympathetic to the heritage values of the place and, no surprise, the Heritage Council rejected the scheme. The major point of contention was the replacement of the existing stepways and, in their position, lifts and new, skewed stairs would be provided. The solution was easy for the local community and it recommended the

⁷⁸ *North Shore Times*, 23rd January 2004, p. 7.

placement of the lifts at the rear of the overhead booking office. CityRail objected to that idea because it wished to create paid and unpaid areas on the footbridge, which was impossible if the lifts were placed on the northern side of the footbridge. There was no formal State Rail Authority policy on the separation of paid and unpaid areas at stations on overhead concourses. The General Manager, Station Operations, Geoff Stirk, said it was just desirable and he described the SRA/RailCorp as an “imperfect organisation”.



On the 20th August 2005, CityRail had placed hoardings around the former concession at the western end of the footbridge building to allow for the construction of one lift. The image affixed to the hoarding displayed the revised location of the lift shafts on the northern side of the building, which was the site desired by the local community. A former concession had been aggressively rebuilt from the Lawrence Drycleaning shop and the image shows the gabled roof with pretend roughcast, renamed as stucco. With the work to upgrade the booking office in 1992, it was necessary to relocate the train indicator board from the eastern to the western side of the booking office. To the right is a recent item of railway history now gone forever. It is a board of brochures, including timetables, station contact details and safety information. Such paper-based documents are longer available at stations. On the extreme left side is the 1992 installed steel balustrading in white paint.

Janine Kitson made a simple and sensible request to the railway authorities.⁷⁹ She asked for the preparation of alternative plans that did not involve the replacement of the stepways and negative visual impact caused by the proposed location of the lifts on the southern side of the footbridge.

⁷⁹ *North Shore Times*, 9th January 2004, p. 5.

CityRail ultimately dropped the original proposal and completed the construction of the lifts in 2006 behind the booking office. The locals were happy. The only person in the district who opposed the community action was the local member of Parliament, Barry O'Farrell. In 2005 and 2006, which included some of the time of the protest about the proposed lifts, O'Farrell was the Shadow Minister for Transport. It would have been in everyone's interest for him to help resolve the dispute between CityRail and the community.⁸⁰ As the Labor Party held government in New South Wales, O'Farrell was more focussed on the politics rather than the people. He was reported as reminding constituents that this was not the first time where local conservation-minded people had protected their history as reflected by the railway infrastructure. He reportedly stated:

“Heritage activists 15 years ago gave the government an excuse not to upgrade the station”.⁸¹

The politician stated that Gordon commuters have had to put up with inadequate access and all-weather coverage for too long.

In 2014, the *North Shore Times* published a press release by Sydney Trains which announced a “facelift” for four stations on the North Shore line, including Gordon.⁸² The article proclaimed that the work was part of the Government’s “refresh programme”. What did refresh work involve? Cleaning external surfaces is the answer.

PART 9

COMMUTER CAR PARKING

STAGE 1 – 1960s

The Department had been negotiating with local government authorities since 1962 on the establishment of commuter car parks on railway land. In 1964, 1,130 spaces were available at 25 suburban stations. To the year ended 30th June 1966, the number of spaces had risen to 3,387 with a further accommodation of 3,272 vehicles under investigation.⁸³

⁸⁰ Barry O'Farrell became Leader of the Opposition between 2007 and 2011 and Premier between 2011 and 2014.

⁸¹ *Sydney Weekly Courier*, 10th December 2003, p. 20.

⁸² *North Shore Times*, 9th July 2014, p. 17.

⁸³ Department of Railways, *Annual Report of the Commissioner to 30th June 1966*, no details, p. 19.

It was the policy of all Railway Commissioner up to the 1960s to decline many requests for commuter car parking on railway land without a financial benefit to the Railways. The Railways did not have sufficient money to operate their railway systems, let alone allocate funds for non-railway facilities. They did not consider that the provision of off-street parking would increase revenue to offset the loss of saleable land.

In August 1962, there was a slight change in policy. Perhaps the Commissioner was prompted by the Victorian Railways a year earlier, which had built a multi-storey structure with a car park capable of holding 300 vehicles at Spencer Street in Melbourne, as well as new passenger waiting rooms, a new booking office and a new space for the Man-in-Grey.⁸⁴

Commissioner McCusker stated that he was “prepared to allow certain land to be used for car parking provided other selected railway property sites were approved for commercial development”.⁸⁵ He was negotiating a deal that would provide a revenue stream. McCusker considered that railway land should be made available for railway commuters and was angered by one unnamed council which restricted car parking to two hours on leased railway land. That council wanted land for car parking but to help shoppers, not train travellers. McCusker was without friends. The planning authority for greater Sydney, the Cumberland County Council, expressed the view that “additional, free parking space should be provided at railway stations as an added facility for passengers and to release space for shoppers at adjacent retail centres”. The Council had submitted a report to the Railway Department suggesting the release of land for parking at Gordon, Hornsby, Kogarah, Riverwood, St. Leonards, Sutherland, West Ryde and Chatswood.⁸⁶ Why would Gordon be among the first location nominated for car parking?

STAGE 2 – THE 1970s

A significant number of senior Railway staff lived at Gordon on the North Shore line and were annoyed at the number of commuters who parked their private motor vehicles in streets close to the station.⁸⁷ The table below indicates that it was Gordon which suffered the most on the North Shore line with street-side parking.

The estimated number of commuter cars parked in the streets at North Shore line stations is shown in the Table below.

⁸⁴ *Railway Transportation*, January 1961, p. 33.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, August 1962, p. 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ The North Shore had long been a place of residence for senior Railway officers. See M.A. Park, “The North Shore Line”, *Bulletin*, April 1945, p. 44.

TABLE: ESTIMATED NUMBERS OF COMMUTER CARS PARKED IN THE STREETS AT NORTH SHORE RAILWAY STATIONS, 1971⁸⁸

STATION	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF COMMUTER MOTOR VEHICLES
Waverton	250
Wollstonecraft	250
St. Leonards	300
Artarmon	300
Chatswood	500
Roseville	300
Lindfield	300
Killara	200
Gordon	500
Pymble	230
Turramurra	260
Warrawee	100
Wahroonga	200
Waitara	270
Hornsby	300
TOTAL	4,260

The County of Cumberland Passenger Transport Advisory Committee recommended the development of an at-grade car park and provided statistics which demonstrated the high costs associated with multi-storey developments. It stated that the cost of a multi-storey development was \$1,400 per space compared with an estimate of \$180-\$190 for surface parking.⁸⁹ There was already a paid car park at Killara station using automatic entry and exit gates and the Committee recommended that a fee should be charged for any car parking at Gordon. So far as access for people with disabilities was concerned with multi-storey car parking, the Committee stated that "lifts and escalators are not considered necessary but modification of station entry and exit arrangements to provide direct access for pedestrians from an overbridge and/or underpass would be most desirable".

The Committee ended its report by recommending the development of two surface car parks holding approximately 370 motor vehicles at a total cost estimated at \$58,000.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ NSW, *Report to the County of Cumberland Passenger Transport Advisory Committee on the Feasibility of Establishing a Major Commuter Car Park at Gordon Railway Station*, unpublished internal report, 1971, pp. 7 & 10.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Senior staff who resided locally were in the best position to implement some action and, in January 1971, a committee comprising of officers from the Department of Railways and the Department of Main Roads submitted a report to Keith King, who was at the time the Executive Secretary of the County of Cumberland Passenger Transport Advisory Committee, on the question of developing a multi-storey car park, holding approximately 500 vehicles, at Gordon on the North Shore line.⁹¹ Unsurprisingly, the Committee said that the “large amount of on-street parking in residential streets..... reduces the amenity of this area as a living zone”.⁹² The Committee stated that the project would only be feasible with associated commercial development. It also recommended charging a parking fee of no more than \$0.20 per day.

Rail transport was a hot issue in 1972 with train delays, vandalised carriages, overcrowding, never-ending industrial disputes and other problems making the experience of rail travel in Sydney frustrating to say the least. The Government was aware of the problem and decided to act in a way which would cost no money. Rather than appoint external consultants, it established in March 1972 a committee of Government-appointed Parliamentarians, called the “Government Parties Committee on Suburban Train Services”. It was chaired by Tom Mead, the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Hurstville, and the Executive Officer was Hilton Stevens from the Ministry of Transport. Mead presented the Committee’s report to the Minister for Transport, Milton Morris in July 1972.⁹³

However, before Mead’s Committee submitted its report, the Minister for Transport announced in January 1972 that “a series of Government built and operated parking stations may be constructed in the near future if a \$3 million, multi-storey pilot building at Gordon proves successful”.⁹⁴ A committee of officials had examined the proposed car park at Gordon and recommended against it on a relative cost basis but did support the idea of surface parking at that location as it was considerably cheaper.⁹⁵ Milton Morris must have known about the adverse recommendation in relation to the multi-level car park at Gordon as the Committee had been meeting every month in 1972.

Morris was mischievous in saying that plans had been prepared by the Department of Main Roads. That was correct but only in relation to a surface car park. Morris

⁹¹ NSW, *Report to the County of Cumberland Passenger Transport Advisory Committee on the Feasibility of Establishing a Major Commuter Car Park at Gordon Railway Station*, unpublished internal report, 1971, pp. 7 & 10.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹³ New South Wales, *Report of the Government Parties Committee on Suburban Train Services*, unpublished report, 1972, p. 24.

⁹⁴ *New South Wales Digest*, January 1972, p. 5.

⁹⁵ NSW, *Report to the County of Cumberland Passenger Transport Advisory Committee on the Feasibility of Establishing a Major Commuter Car Park at Gordon Railway Station*, unpublished internal report, 1971, pp. 7 &

indicated that other locations suggested for “aerial space” parking stations included Strathfield, Blacktown and Hurstville. None of these ever received any multi-level commuter car park following the Minister’s announcement in the following 20 years. Future commuter car parking policy gave priority to smaller stations as land at those locations was more likely to be available and far more likely to present lower land acquisition costs.

STAGE 3 – THE 1980s AND LATER

The acceleration of car spaces at stations occurred in the 1980s under David Hill’s leadership. Regular press releases were issued about the ever-increasing number of car spaces. Hill appointed a senior project manager specifically to increase the availability of parking.

In 2025, 200 railway stations have a total of 20,000 spaces. Gordon played an important role in reaching that target and now has 124 spaces in Werona Avenue, which was upgraded in June 2015. From 27th February 2019, a new three level parking station was opened with 213 spaces in Henry Street. It was built by A.E. Edwards, a well-known construction company. Now, commuters wishing to use the Henry Street facility have real-time data showing the number of vacant spaces. Commuters enter the car park free of charge with the use of their Opal card. A new bus/rail interchange also opened in early June 2015. There are also 381 spaces along Wade Lane that are under the management of Ku-ring-gai Council intended for shoppers.



These two images summarise what is significant at Gordon station. It was local residents who were passionate about their built heritage that enabled these images to be captured in 2025.

On the left, the image taker is standing in the signal box looking up the stepway to the footbridge. It was the local community who stopped the construction of lifts between the platform building and the footbridge, thereby breaking the visual link between these two important parts of the heritage precinct. They also secured the original stepways. If the CityRail initial proposal went ahead, this image would have been impossible to record. On the right, the lensman records the ambience in the Cleaner's Passage. The only light afforded to the pan man was borrowed light through a window in a transverse wall separating the Passage and the female toilet. Now, the work conditions in the early 20th century are retained for future generations to see, not visualise. Again, thanks are due to the Gordon community.

PART 10 – THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GORDON STATION

Far more important than the heritage and history of Gordon station is the chronicle about the involvement of local community members seeking better outcomes than those proposed by State government bureaucracies. This was evident in the advocacy of a subway to reach the island platform in 1910 and, more recently, in the action of residents between 2003 and 2006 to oppose the location of lifts to the platforms because of the adverse implications on the heritage-listed structures. The success of their campaign is a testament to the potential power that can be mustered to achieve improved outcomes not only for the structures but for future generations of travellers who will use the station.

The heritage of Gordon station is significant. By and large, the precinct contains a composition of buildings that existed over 110 years previously. The waiting shed on platform No. 1, with its vertically-set boards on the external walls, has high conservation values based on the rarity of its construction and on the rarity of timber railway buildings, being one of eight timber buildings in the Sydney metropolitan area. The early use of ramps to access the footbridge, the use of haunched beams in the design of the footbridge and the first use of asbestos cement slates on the roof of the overhead booking office contribute to the high conservation values.

The history of the place is also significant. The station's existence tells the story of the significant political power of landholders who also were directly involved in the line's opening through their election to the Legislative Assembly in New South Wales. Political involvement was also the probable reason that the Railway Commissioners agreed to install ramps through the role of Premier Charles Wade, who was also the local Member of Parliament. Gordon station was also closely involved in the development of commuter car parks.

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Stuart Sharp

25th January 2025

APPENDIX 1

THE TEMPORAL, TOPOGRAPHIC, POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL CONTEXT IN WHICH THE NORTH SHORE LINE AND GORDON STATION WERE BUILT

1. THE CHANGE IN THE NATURE OF POLITICAL POWER THAT ENCOURAGED THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NORTH SHORE RAILWAY

The linking of political power and the application of public money for political purposes existed well before the residential development of the North Shore in Sydney. In fact, all new New South Wales railway lines were motivated by politics, except perhaps the construction of the metropolitan goods lines in the 1910-1920 period. However, the nature of politics changed in 1881 with the passage of the 1881 Public Loans Act. It was in 1881 that Parliament allocated £1,020,000 for the construction of the line between Sydney and Kiama which focussed not on the electors of the South Coast but the direct financial interests of the politicians in Parliament making the decision to build the railway line. It was the personal land and resource (i.e. coal) company ownerships that formed the basis of the legislative approval. Additionally, the Illawarra railway was marketed to fellow politicians as a means of exploiting the opportunity for subdividing large metropolitan land holdings and lowering transport costs to facilitate the exploitation of known coal reserves. Even more powerful politicians owned land on the North Shore and the railway branch was aimed to serve future residential allotments as well as purporting a financial benefit for long distance freight traffic from Newcastle and beyond.

The North Shore line opened on 1st January 1890 and, together with the extension from Queanbeyan to Cooma, was the last new line built under John Whiton's leadership as Engineer-in-Chief, Railway Construction. The line opened after he had proceeded on pre-retirement leave.

2. THE SECOND SUBURBAN LINE IN SYDNEY – THE LINK BETWEEN POWER, MONEY AND THE TOPOGRAPHY

Sydney as a city did not expand physically in the 19th century because of an expansive railway system. The initial section of the line to Kiama opened to Hurstville in 1884 and it was the first truly suburban railway line. The next suburban railway line received funding of £400,000 under the Public Works Loan Act of 1883 was the North Shore line with an unspecified commencement date and termination location. There was a geographical connection between the land in the St. George and North Shore areas.

Both were located areas with attractive natural features, such as hilly parts allowing good distance vistas, proximity to bush and trees and access to riverine waterways. These natural characteristics were attractive to people who could afford both construction in isolated areas and transport between homes and places of business. Hence, it is no wonder that the North Shore line became the second suburban railway.

Both geographical areas (i.e. the St George region and the North Shore) allowed the expansion of the residential development opportunities to which people are drawn with a desire to make fast and easy money, i.e., land developers. Their first for money was aided by government policy. Opportunities for governments to earn income from land sales in rural areas had virtually ended in 1882 and the government focus became the sale of suburban allotments in the Sydney area. Everyone seemed to be a winner – government, developer and householders.

The very idea of building a railway to serve elevated land was based on British notions that high hills and high society went together. The construction of the North Shore line was an example of the belief that important or rich people prefer to build on the highest possible ground so that their houses can look down on poorer and less powerful folk. In this way, the development of the North Shore line was and remains a physical statement of social expression which was based on a concept that has existed before Lieutenant James Cook chartered the east coast of Australia.

Space is an important ingredient in the provision of railways. Without space between places, there is no need for railways or any form of transport. Space and transport are utilities in economic terms and it is the function of railways “to supply the utility of place and transport”.⁹⁶ Put in simple non-economic terms, “the complexity of modern life provides endless reasons for movements of people and goods”.⁹⁷

Tass wrote that urban areas usually start with “favourable geographic conditions”.⁹⁸ The North Shore region of Sydney possessed such favourable conditions, with its increased vegetation, near-by waterways, elevation and vistas, compared with, say, the western suburbs of Sydney. It remains different to other regions because it is blocked by national parks on all sides. To the south is the Sydney Harbour National Park. To the east is Garigal National Park and to the west is Lane Cove National Park. The area is capped in the north by Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. The region is similarly boxed in by water on all sides, being Sydney Harbour, Middle Harbour, the Lane Cove River and the Hawkesbury River. The region is extremely hilly and the road and rail corridors mainly use the mountain ridges. Houses were and are traditionally more expensive to construct because of the steepness of many land sites. These higher costs have been passed on to subsequent purchasers of the land and,

⁹⁶ R.W. Faulks, *Principles of Transport*, London, Ian Allan, Second Ed., 1982, p. 27

⁹⁷ G.W. Woellner & R.E. Delaney, *Schumer's Elements of Transport*, Third Ed., Sydney, Butterworths, 1974, p. 1

⁹⁸ L. Tass, *Modern Rapid Transit*, New York, Carlton Press, 1971, p. 65

today, the North Shore remains an expensive place to live, in part because of the geography of the place.

At first, the North Shore railway allowed people to live in a specific area amongst their mental peers. This pattern lasted until 1947 when 97.9% of the Australian population was born in either Australia or the United Kingdom.⁹⁹ From that time, overseas migration from non-English speaking countries has steadily expanded and accelerated greatly and especially after 1973 when the then Whitlam Commonwealth Government removed the last vestiges of racial discrimination legislation relating to migration. The excellent railway service, a tolerance of apartment living and the location of business nodes at North Sydney, St. Leonards and Chatswood have contributed to a massive influx of most-welcomed, Asian residents.

Today, the North Shore has one geographic feature that many parts of Sydney do not enjoy – a multitude of trees. The bushland setting, especially adjacent to the waterways and in the Upper North Shore, has and does attract a certain type of resident but the large absence of flat land has also mitigated against the extensive establishment of features found in other parts of Sydney, namely noxious industries and large recreational facilities, such as racecourses and professional football fields.¹⁰⁰ In Sydney, football was played in the past where workers lived or worked. Not so on the North Shore. The Gordon Football Club was and is not located at Gordon but much lower on the North Shore at Chatswood. North Sydney oval was located to cater for the leisure interests of workers. The first cricket pitch was laid in 1867 and the first spectator grandstand was erected in 1879. By 1929, North Sydney oval possessed the largest suburban grandstand in Sydney. Apart from North Sydney and Chatswood Ovals, there are no further large sporting facilities on the North Shore.

3. THE GEOGRAPHIC PRECEDENTS THAT MANIFEST THE LINK BETWEEN POWER, MONEY AND LOCATION

Six years before the opening of the North Shore railway, NSW politicians opened the railway line to Hurstville, as the first part of the Illawarra railway to Wollongong. The very direction of the railway between Hurstville and Sutherland was designed to maximise returns to property developers. Joan Hatton and Lesley Muir, historians, identified that the route was selected because the “elevated localities were ideal for suburban homes”.¹⁰¹ A less hilly route lay via Rocky Point for loaded coal trains but it was the land speculators who persuaded the NSW political leaders to route the line via Hurstville. The link between high ground and high society was transferred to North Sydney and Willoughby, where the hills were so steep that a cable tramway had to be used. The North Shore was developed because of its elevated position and the rail transport initially served the interests of local land speculators.

⁹⁹ L.J. Aspin, *Focus on Australian Society*, Second Ed., Melbourne, Longman, 1997, p. 51

¹⁰⁰ The existence of tanneries is acknowledged.

¹⁰¹ J. Hatton & L. Muir, *Triumph of the Speculators*, Southern History Group, 1984, p. 48

In the 19th century, civil engineers, while building railways, would avoid difficult or costly physical works if at all possible. In the 19th century, this was evident in the decision to build an almost straight line of trunk railway from Narromine to Bourke on the western line, bypassing all the established towns on the Macquarie River, including Warren and Canonbar and, again, on the southern line bypassing Yass. Considering the difficult terrain on the North Shore line, it is no wonder that the senior engineers in the NSW rail administration wanted to avoid constructing the line unless adequate funding was provided.

Mechanical engineers shared their civil engineering colleagues' concern to avoid problems. There have been several examples where the rail administration has opposed providing a station on a gradient. The omission of a station on the steep gradient of Como Bank between the Georges River and Sutherland until 1931 when Jannali was opened is a suburban example. The decision to avoid a station at Murrumburrah on the steep Demondrille Bank led to the provision of an inconvenient station three kilometres away at Harden. The delay between surveying the site for Artarmon station and its opening is explained by the engineers' reluctance to provide stations on gradients generally. Artarmon station was and is on the steepest gradient of the North Shore line and the difficulty of working trains on the line resulted in substantial modifications to both motive power and track.

The people who were involved in land development on the North Shore had a lot of prior experience with land speculation in other parts of Sydney well before opening up the North Shore area for subdivision. Indeed, politics and the need to make large sums of money have long been important ingredients in the commencement, development and operation of the New South Wales Railways. It was the "overwhelming support and political influence of the large land owners and the public of Goulburn" that resulted in the opening of the first inland railway in the Colony of New South Wales to that city in 1869.¹⁰² The people of Goulburn were a powerful lot and were directly responsible for the introduction of the first elected Parliament in the Colony in 1856. What was their need for a railway? As Austin Mooney wrote, "to the people of Goulburn, who faced abysmal conditions using road transport, a railway was seen as a cure by creating a rapid transport system for the efficient delivery of produce and goods to and from the metropolis".¹⁰³ Rail transport represented a substantial cost savings with the added benefit of a taxpayer subsidy.

In the Sydney metropolitan area, the push for the opening of stations on the existing line to Parramatta was not related to freight traffic, as was the case for Goulburn, but to real estate development. When the Sydney to Parramatta line opened in 1855, stations were provided at Newtown, Ashfield, Burwood, Homebush and Granville. In addition to Petersham and Lidcombe, which were opened in 1857 and 1858, these

¹⁰² A. Mooney, "How the Railway Arrived at Goulburn", *Australian Railway History*, volume 67 number 939, January 2016, p. 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

were the only stations at which goods yards were opened in the next hundred years on that section of line. All other stations between Sydney and Parramatta were opened without the provision of freight facilities with the express purpose of developing adjacent real estate. It was a case of political power being discharged to serve the financial desires of property developers. This was the case at Stanmore, Summer Hill, Lewisham, Croydon, Strathfield, Flemington, Rookwood, Auburn, Clyde and Harris Park. None of these stations ever had a local freight yard. In essence, there were two types of stations. The first group of stations were all opened in the 1850s for freight and passenger business, and the second group, which were opened from the 1870s, were purely passenger stations.

4. THE IMPACT OF THE OPENING OF THE NORTH SHORE RAILWAY LINE IN 1890

Suburbanisation of Sydney started in the 1880s with residential development, amongst other areas, on the North Shore at present day North Sydney and Willoughby. It is well established that the major public transport network in Sydney was provided by steam trams in the 1880s, which in turn fostered further development. Steam trams were very much restricted by steep gradients and it was for this reason that Sydney's first cable tram was opened in 1886 between the Milsons Point ferry terminal and Ridge Street, near St. Leonards Park.

The North Shore railway has sociological relevance because it explains a major feature still current in the demography of Sydney. Physical location or relocation of residences equals mental location or relocation of the occupiers. It is a common trait of Australian born people of Anglo-Saxon descent to often hide and run away in preference to confronting other Australians who may possess different characteristics or views. Today, Anglo-Saxons dominate the fringe suburbs of Sydney in order to escape from perceived unpleasantnesses which they perceive as being prevalent in the middle ring of suburbs. It was the railway in 1893 that similarly allowed many people to physically escape to a location where they felt they shared similar views to the existing residents. The North Shore railway was itself used as a tool of segregation, especially before the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932, by the wealthy classes.

5. THE BOND BETWEEN LAND DEVELOPMENT, RAILWAYS AND THE POWER OF POLITICIANS

There was a strong link between local landowners and politicians. Until 1889, there was no payment to members of the NSW Parliament. Moreover, landowners and graduates of the University of Sydney were entitled to more than one vote in colonial general elections until 1893. Therefore, politicians had to have independent income in order to support their Parliamentary duties. By 1875, the majority of the members of the NSW Legislative Assembly came from a background in banking and commerce

rather than rural industries.¹⁰⁴ Almost one third of the legislation considered by the Assembly related to “conservation and development”, including land management and railway construction. It is unsurprising that many of the people associated with land development on the North Shore were the very politicians who were enacting legislation to allow railway construction and land subdivision. One such politician was Alexander Stuart, who held large tracts of land on the north side of the Harbour. Although called by one of his banking contemporaries as “a dangerous man to have anything to do with a bank”, he was Premier of the Colony in 1882 and 1883, a time when the trial surveys of the North Shore railway were undertaken.¹⁰⁵

6. RAILWAYS NOT TRAMWAYS THE PREFERRED MODE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

With the opening of the Illawarra line in 1884, land speculators, developers and purchasers identified suburban subdivisions for residential allotments with the steam train, not trams. This was again emphasised by the opening of a railway rather than a tramway to Belmore in 1895, the selection of trains to Carlingford in 1901 and the conversion of the Castle Hill tramway to rail in 1923. It was the steam locomotive that was used by the NSW Government, as the owner of both the tram and train systems, to advertise broad social advancement and progress rather than steam trams. The general public happily supported the notion. Steam trams in Sydney were associated with existing urban development and not the physical expansion of Sydney.

Powerful residents of the Eastern Suburbs began agitating for a government owned tram system in 1873 and this became the big debate in that year in the NSW Legislative Council.¹⁰⁶ The similarity of powerful people and pleasant physical environment stimulated the preparation of a public petition to the NSW Government in 1874 by North Shore residents for a railway to serve the district.¹⁰⁷ It comes as no surprise that both the North Shore and the Eastern Suburbs were not long after recipients of government tramways, but not the type of steam-hauled trams provided for the rest of Sydney. These two locations received trams hauled by cables which eliminated the nuisances of smoke and noise from local streets.

7. THE ALLUREMENT OF THE NORTH SHORE

Concepts relating to power, motive and clustering are relevant to understand the type of early settlers on the North Shore and why they made their first call for a North Shore railway in the 1870s. People lived on the North Shore of Sydney because they were either repulsed by the atrocious living conditions of the Sydney city centre or they were

¹⁰⁴ G.N. Hawker, *The Parliament of New South Wales 1850-1965*, Sydney, Government Printer, 1971, p.16

¹⁰⁵ Description from G. Souter, *Mosman - a History*, Melbourne University Press, 1995, p.90

¹⁰⁶ J. Jarvis, *The History of Woollahra*, Woollahra Municipal Council, no date, p. 83

¹⁰⁷ K. Cook, *The Railway Came to Ku-ring-gai*, Pymble, Genlin Investments, 1991, p. iii

attracted by the pleasant natural environment. The position is summarised by Fitzgerald:

“Anyone who had the money for the bus fare knew that life in Woollahra or parts of the North Shore could compare favourably with the best in the world, both in terms of housing standards and environmental delights. And anyone who took the trouble to stroll through West Sydney or Alexandria knew that, for many, life was mean and cramped, with generous amounts of filth, disease and economic uncertainty”.¹⁰⁸

At the end of the 1870s, James Inglis wrote that “the invasion of (residential) construction has bridged the Harbour, and laid out streets innumerable on the North Shore”¹⁰⁹

8. LOCAL PRESSURE FOR SURVEYS TO BE COMPLETED

One major factor that helped the push for the North Shore railway was the incorporation of the Municipality of North Willoughby in 1865, which included Artarmon, Lane Cove and Willoughby. At the right time, the Council of North Willoughby acted as an important pressure group and advocated improved public transport. Early in the 1880s, the then St. Leonards (present day North Sydney) Municipal Council, with its Mayor, William Tunks, was also a leading pressure group demanding improved transport in and to the area.¹¹⁰

Initial trial surveys for a railway line were undertaken in 1881 and 1882 but the plans were destroyed in the Garden Palace fire in the Botanic Gardens in 1882. In December 1883, surveys were reported as being “incomplete” and no decision had been taken on the line’s destination, though it was established at that time that the junction with the existing rail network would be “Pearce’s Corner (i.e. Hornsby).¹¹¹ Further surveys were carried out in 1884 and 1887. All throughout the 1880s, there was never-ending discussion in newspapers about a railway and other transport modes between the north side of Sydney Harbour and both the south side of the Harbour and northwards towards Newcastle.

Sydney’s first purely suburban railway was to be located on the North Shore because the place was inhabited by people who held social, political and monetary power. They did not want street tramways because they considered these inferior to railways. Railways operated on their own right of way and did not deposit smoke and soot directly on residents’ doorstep as was the case with steam trams. Landholders associated the concept of progress exclusively with the steam engine, not the steam

¹⁰⁸ S. Fitzgerald, *Rising Damp - Sydney 1870-90*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 41

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by J. Birmingham, *Leviathan*, Milsons Point, Random House, 2000, p. 202

¹¹⁰ For example, see *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 26th March, 1881, pp. 12 & 13.

¹¹¹ *Evening News*, 1st December, 1883, p. 6.

tram. Henry Parkes, the local Member of Parliament and Premier for St. Leonards, supported the selection of trains over trams in 1886 because of his dislike of the latter – a dislike shared by many users of steam trams.¹¹²

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¹¹² D. Burke, *Juggernaut*, Sydney, Kangaroo Press, 1997, p. 88

APPENDIX 2

THE BUILDINGS AT NORTH SHORE LINE STATIONS 1890

STATION	BEST GUESS FOR BUILDING APPROVAL DATE	BUILDING TYPE	WALL MATERIAL	NOTES
Wahroonga	29 th May 1888 (PWD date stamp of general arrangement plan)	Single pitched roof - single room waiting shed c20 feet by 12 feet – roof sloping towards platform coping	Timber frame with walls covered with weatherboards	Architectural plan does not exist – design based on 1909 plan when the building was relocated to Point Clare
Turramurra	28 th June 1888 (PWD date stamp) – standard Whitton design	Gabled roof – three room ‘waiting shed’ 36 feet by 14 feet built on piles – no awning over platform	Timber frame with walls covered with weatherboards	Whitton introduced this design in 1885 as an economic measure
Pymble	The rear of an old house owned by Robert Pymble was converted into a temporary ticket office and waiting room	NA	NA	
Gordon	30 th August 1888 (PWD date stamp) –	Gabled roof - Mini three room standard	Timber frame with	The builder was Alex Scouller, who

STATION	BEST GUESS FOR BUILDING APPROVAL DATE	BUILDING TYPE	WALL MATERIAL	NOTES
	standard Whitton design	roadside design – 37 feet x 13 feet internal – one pavilion - open-front waiting room	weatherboard cladding	built Chatswood, Gordon and Turramurra platform buildings – Chatswood plan signed 21 st February 1889.
Lindfield	24 th September 1888 (PWD date stamp) – standard Whitton design	A plan exists for a one room timber waiting shed 15 feet by 9 feet, with a mono-pitched roof sloping away from the platform coping	Timber frame with weatherboard cladding - there was no platform awning	Possibly not built as space on the plan for the contractor's signature left blank
Roseville	There is no evidence of the first platform building – it is assumed that it was a single room timber shelter shed as no staff were allocated			

STATION	BEST GUESS FOR BUILDING APPROVAL DATE	BUILDING TYPE	WALL MATERIAL	NOTES
	to the station until 1899			
Chatswood	24 th September 1888 (PWD date stamp) – standard Whitton design	Gabled roof - mini three room standard roadside design – 37 feet x 13 feet internal – one pavilion - open-front waiting room	Timber frame with weatherboard cladding	The builder was Alex Scouller, who built Chatswood, Gordon and Turramurra platform buildings – Chatswood plan signed 21 st February 1889.
St. Leonards	9 th September 1888 (PWD date stamp) – post Whitton design	Gabled roof - modified standard roadside design – 55 feet x 14 feet wide internal – two pavilions	Brick Built by William Refshange – signed 8 th November 1889	Possibly the first platform building approved by or under the leadership of Henry Deane

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APPENDIX 3

NUMBER OF MILES OPEN PER £ OF BORROWED CAPITAL 1880-1894

YEAR	AMOUNT OF CAPITAL BORROWED (£000s)	MILES OPEN	AVERAGE COST PER MILE OPEN (£000s)
1880	1638	115	14
1881	2163	167	13
1882	2216	282	8
1883	2484	171	14
1884	2799	169	17
1885	2838	227	13
1886	2587	162	16
1887	1394	151	9
1888	1001	166	6
1889	630	57	11
1890	1204	10	12
1891	3110	1	31
1892	1846	133	9
1893	1153	154	8
1894	670	150	4

SOURCE: N.G. Butlin, *Investment in Australian Economic Development 1861-1900*, Cambridge University Press, 1971, pp. 322 & 324.

Stuart Sharp

25th January 2025

APPENDIX 4

FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS AND INDEBTEDNESS – NEW SOUTH WALES 1880-1895

YEAR	ALLOCATION OF PROPOSED ANNUAL EXPENDITURE ON RAILWAYS EXPRESSED IN THE PUBLIC LOANS ACTS £	LOAN FUNDS AMOUNT ACTUALLY SPENT BY YEAR ON RAILWAYS ASSESSED BY BUTLIN £	TOTAL AMOUNT OF CAPITAL INVESTED ON LINES OPENED ASSESSED BY NSWR (INCLUDES NEW & EXISTING LINES & ROLLINGSTOCK) £	AMOUNT OF THE TOTAL N.S.W. PUBLIC DEBT (INCLUDES INTEREST ON LOANS) £
1880	1,012,000	1,638,000	11,778,819	14,904,000
1881	7,626,500	2,163,000	13,301,597	16,924,000
1882		2,216,000	15,843,616	18,721,000
1883	1,645,000	2,484,000	16,905,014	24,632,000
1884	13,613,500	2,709,000	20,080,133	30,102,000
1885	5,200,000 ¹¹³	2,838,000	21,831,276	35,564,000
1886	1,988,000	2,587,000	24,071,454	41,034,000
1887		1,394,000	26,532,122	40,994,000
1888	905,500	1,001,000	27,722,748 ¹¹⁴	44,093,000
1889	Nil for new lines & 1,928,820 for existing lines	630,000	29,889,167	48,554,000

¹¹³ TA Coghlan, *The Wealth and Progress of New South Wales 1895–6*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1897, p. 719 quoted in <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/economy>.

¹¹⁴ Accounting period changed in 1888 from 31st December to 30th June in each year.

YEAR	ALLOCATION OF PROPOSED ANNUAL EXPENDITURE ON RAILWAYS EXPRESSED IN THE PUBLIC LOANS ACTS £	LOAN FUNDS AMOUNT ACTUALLY SPENT BY YEAR ON RAILWAYS ASSESSED BY BUTLIN £	TOTAL AMOUNT OF CAPITAL INVESTED ON LINES OPENED ASSESSED BY NSWR (INCLUDES NEW & EXISTING LINES & ROLLINGSTOCK) £	AMOUNT OF THE TOTAL N.S.W. PUBLIC DEBT (INCLUDES INTEREST ON LOANS) £
1890	1,527,550	1,204,000	30,555,123	48,383,000
1891		3,110,000	31,768,617	52,951,000
1892	362,389 (for new lines) + 515,000 (for existing lines) = 877,389	1,846,000	33,612,608	54,473,000
1893	266,075 (for new lines) + 150,000 (for existing lines) = 416,075	1,153,000	34,657,571	59,329,000
1894	116,600 (for new lines) + 95,000 (for existing lines) = 211,600	670,000	35,855,271	59,026,000
1895	317,325 (for new lines) + 180,000 (for existing lines) = 495,325	462,000	36,611,366	58,221,000

SOURCES: *Proposed allocations from the various Public Loans Acts (to 1889)/Loans Acts (from 1890); Actual amounts expended on railways from N. G. Butlin, Investment in Australian Economic Development, Canberra, Australian National University, 1972, p. 322; Figures for amount of capital invested on new lines are derived from the various Annual Reports of the Railway Commissioner & total N.S.W. public debt statistics from Alan Barnard, Source Papers in Economic History – Preliminary Statistics of N.S.W. Government Finances 1850-1982, Source Paper No. 8, Australian National University, 1985, Table 1 – State Government Debt, Surplus and Revenue, 1850-1968.*

Stuart Sharp 25th January 2025

APPENDIX 5

SAFEWORKING AT GORDON BY GRAHAM HARPER

1. STAFF AND TICKET AND ELECTRIC STAFF WORKING ON SINGLE LINE

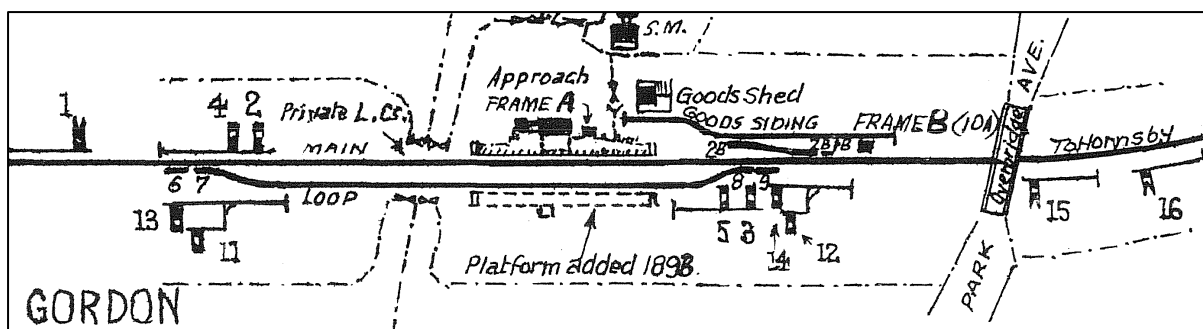
Gordon was opened in conjunction with the new line between Hornsby and St Leonards on January 1, 1890. The safeworking system in use was ordinary train staff and ticket, and Gordon would appear to have been a fully signalled crossing loop from the opening.

This state of affairs lasted little more than a month, as Gordon and Turramurra were, according to well-known railway historian, C.C. Singleton, closed as booking stations around February 4. This was apparently done to compensate for the anticipated failure of revenue to meet forecasts. The failure was expected to be the result of there being no direct connection between the communities along the North Shore Line and the ferries crossing the harbour. Until the extension of the railway from St Leonards to Milsons Point in 1893, there was an awkward gap in the public transport arrangements.

Singleton writes that on February 4, 1890, the ordinary train staff and ticket crossing facility was relocated from Gordon to Pymble where signals were already provided and attended for protection of the Lane Cove Road level crossing. He says that a short layby siding was provided to allow a light engine or a very short goods train to be put away for a passenger train. The viability of this arrangement is thrown into doubt by an entry in *Weekly Notice No. 11* of 1890, to the effect that from March 19, 1890, the staff section would be Chatswood to Hornsby. Whatever the arrangements were before, they ceased by that date. Possibly there were insufficient movements of light engines and short goods trains to warrant retention of the Pymble crossing siding facility.

The arrangements at Gordon from the outset were as shown in the Singleton diagram reproduced below. It was reopened as a crossing station on July 1, 1893, around the same time as the completion of the line to Milsons Point.

Electric train staff replaced the ordinary train staff and ticket working on October 15, 1895.



The signals were typical of the time and designed to minimise the number of signal posts. Where access to the crossing loop was by way of a right-hand turnout, the signal arms were placed one above the other, meaning that the straight-ahead route was governed by the top arm. The signals for the opposite direction were conventional bracketed arms with the importance of the route indicated by the relative height of the arm on each bracket. The layout was controlled from a 16-lever open-air interlocking frame on the platform.

Another platform, serving the loop, was brought into use in 1898.

Things then remained fairly stable for the next decade.

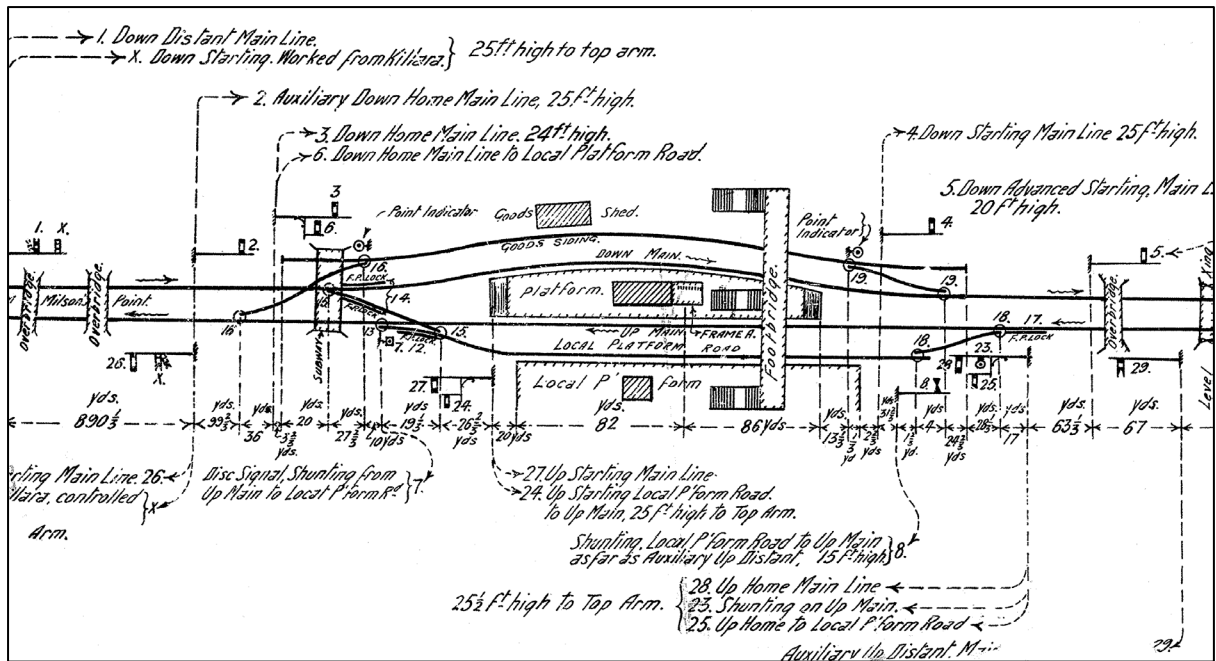
2. DOUBLE LINE BLOCK TELEGRAPH WORKING

In 1909, the line was duplicated through Gordon. On September 12, 1909, a new island platform was brought into use between the future Down Main line and the existing main line which became the new Up Main. For a short time, the place functioned as a Down and Up Main crossing loop, still using the old lever frame. The original crossing loop was taken out of use as was its platform.

A diagram dated September 18, 1909, was issued to commemorate the duplication between Gordon and Turramurra and shows the old crossing loop back in use as a local platform road. The island platform was provided with a standard brick building with an extended awning at the north end to provide cover for the lever frame. On September 24, double line working was introduced between Lindfield and Gordon and a new 30 lever interlocking frame was brought into use at Gordon.

A new loop goods siding was installed at the same time.

The double line sections were operated by Preece's one wire block instruments, later superseded by Tyler's one wire three position instruments. The ultimate track arrangement is shown on the diagram below.



Traffic was obviously growing because new block signal boxes were provided at Killara and Pymble at the time of duplication. These signal boxes could be switched in as required to provide shorter headways during busy times of the day.

Some points should be noted relating to the local platform road. Firstly, Gordon was the first station so equipped, although trains also terminated at Chatswood and Lindfield. Chatswood got its terminal platform in 1919, and Lindfield in 1922; at both places the running round of loco-hauled terminators was less cumbersome than at Gordon.

3. AUTOMATIC SIGNALLING

Automatic signalling using double light colour light signals was introduced between Lindfield and Hornsby on May 8, 1928. Gordon was the only box retained between those stations.

For some reason, the Gordon terminal facility had its direct access for Up trains preserved until today. Chatswood and Lindfield were provided with head in facilities for Down trains and a trailing crossover at the terminal end to release the engine onto the Up Main to run around its train. This meant that the whole run round could take place within the protection of the home signal.



This photograph shows the goods shed in its original position, before it was relocated further south upon track duplication. Note that the signals towards the right side and located on a bracketed post whereas the starting signals for trains proceeding in the opposite direction are located on a single post. Safeworking historian, Graham Harper, comments on the arrangement of the signals. He writes: "It's two arms for each signal post, either on a bracket or one above the other. The rule of what got what is given below. If the through route was to the left, you got the two arms one above the other as the top arm would apply to the through route. Hence, Gordon had the arms one above the other applying to the Down signals because the top arm applied to the through route under the rule of top to bottom left to right reading of signals, including shunt signals. Why it was so is a bit of a mystery, but I am aware that during the same period [1890s] some double line stations had home signals sharing the same posts as the starters for the opposite direction. One reason was apparently to save on signal posts".¹¹⁵ Harper adds that this policy was implemented between 1884 and 1890, with possibly some later exceptions. There were a couple of instances where this rule appears to have been disregarded, but the vast majority of loops signalled in this way conformed to the rule.

SOURCE: Google.

At Gordon, the points allowing Up trains to arrive in the terminal road were more often used for an engine running round a train which had terminated. To achieve this, it was necessary for the engine from the terminating train to shunt into the Pymble block section, outside the home signal, before running back through the Up Main platform to the southern end, where it could reverse onto its train. This working required the Gordon signaller to send the 'blocking back outside home signal' bell code to Pymble to ensure that no train was offered by the Pymble signaller while the section was obstructed by the light engine.

A 'bowtie' wrong road signal was provided at Gordon for the engine's move onto the Up Main; it allowed the engine to proceed in the wrong direction as far as the Up Inner

¹¹⁵ Email from Graham Harper on 16th December 2024.

Distant signal. A subsidiary shunting signal mounted beneath the Up Home signals gave authority for the locomotive to proceed through the Up platform to reach the other end of the train. The provision persisted with the introduction of automatic signals in 1928, although from that time protection of the wrong line shunt was afforded by the Up Accept signal.

Another oddity of the Gordon track layout was the single slip points access to the terminal platform at the southern end. These were for very many years the only slip points on the North Shore line regularly used by passenger trains and the arrangement lasted until the layout reconfiguration of the mid-1990s.

Prior to the automatic signalling, Gordon had no trailing main lines crossover. Sometime in 1928, the diamond crossing in the Down Main as part of the Up Main to goods siding was converted into a single slip allowing for moves from the Up Main to either the Down Main or the goods siding. The goods siding points at that end were disconnected from the signal box and operated from a nearby ground frame together with the new main lines crossover. The ground frame was unlocked by a key from the signal box frame.

Another oddity of the advent of automatic signalling at Gordon was the provision of two levers to control the Up Accepting signal – No.29, Up Accept Main to Terminal Road, and No.30, Up Accept Main. This peculiar arrangement, the reasons for which are unknown, lasted right up to the time the mechanical lever frame was removed in late 1994. Only one other instance comes to mind – the old Flemington Station Box had for a period a Down Accept, Main to Branch [i.e. stock sidings]. In this case it was a banner signal mounted on the signal bridge, adjacent to the Main Line accept signal.

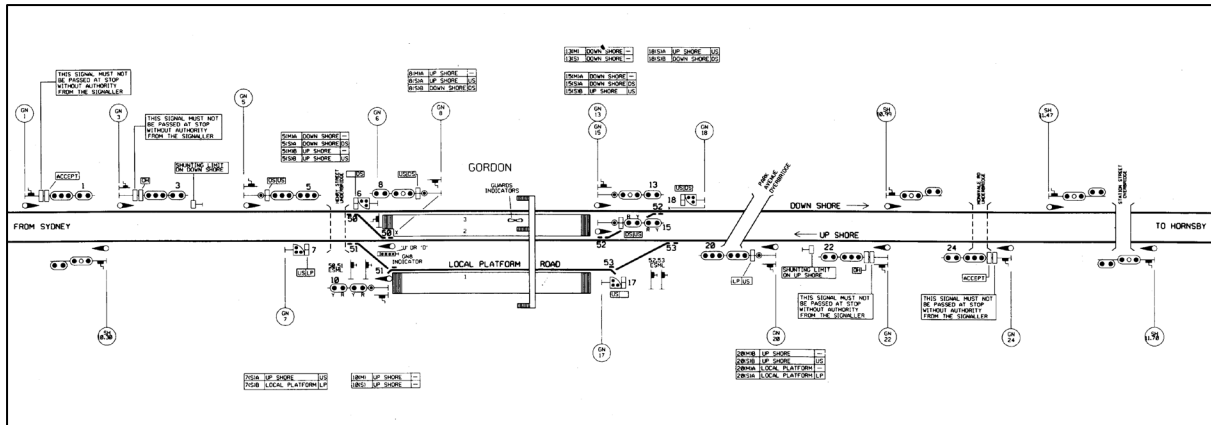
The arrangement at Gordon ended in 1968 with the removal of the Up line connection with the goods siding leaving the main line crossover operated from a single lever. Such was the state of play until the remodelling of the mid-1990s. As part of the remodelling, the crossover was abolished.

Meanwhile, electrification of the entire line Milsons Point and Hornsby was commissioned on August 15, 1927. Also in that year, the goods siding was extended southward to serve the new Gordon substation.

4. REMOTE CONTROL OF THE GORDON INTERLOCKING

On April 5, 1994, as an interim stage, the current layout was commissioned, with power points and some new signals all controlled by the mechanical frame in the old signal box.

Over the October long weekend in 1994, Gordon and Lindfield signal boxes were abolished [Chatswood had succumbed already] and control was by way of solid-state interlocking from Sydney Control Centre. The new layout appears below.



Despite the nomenclature adopted for the lines through the platforms, terminating trains must use the centre platform road, and when that platform is occupied by a terminating train, Up trains use the Local Platform Road to pass it. The layout design allows for termination of trains in either direction – handy for emergencies or trackwork.

5. THE INTERESTING CASE OF SIGNAL GN6



The above image shows a northbound train about to enter platform No. 3 at Gordon. The signal shown is Gordon signal GN6 – Up Shunt on Down Shore. What is the purpose of signal GN6? Why would a down train want to reverse? Would it be to proceed past, then through the crossover and stable in No. 2 platform? Graham Harper tells us: “I would assume that the flexibility is there, particularly when track work on one side of Gordon might mean that a train had to terminate in No.3 platform while No.2 platform was occupied, then shunt out and back after that train had departed. Also, the signals could be used for shunting/running around work trains. The same arrangement would apply to an Up train terminating in No.1 platform when No.2 platform was occupied.

The normal indication, stop, is given by two red lights next to each other. When the signal is cleared, the two red lights are extinguished and a single yellow light appears above them. There is only one available route but, as this is a wrong line movement, a route indicator shows DS [Down Shore] to alert the driver that he is travelling in the 'wrong' direction. The signal allows the driver to proceed outside the home signal as far as a shunting limit board which is located between the Down Accept and Down Home signals. A similar arrangement is in place for wrong line shunts on the Up Shore towards Pymble. I would assume that there is sufficient space between the points and shunting limit boards in each direction to accommodate an eight car electric train, not just an engine.

Gordon is arranged so that a train can be overtaken while standing at any of the three platforms. Where there is no home signal facing the movement, shunt signals like GN6 are used. Where there is a home signal, a subsidiary shunt signal is attached to that signal, together with a route indicator where necessary. The reason for all the possible shunting movements was so trains could be shunted in safety with all moves signalled and all points electrically locked – all controlled from afar. Using flagmen instead of signals to authorise a movement in the wrong direction on a running line would be fraught with peril. A flagman would have no means of actually seeing that the necessary signals were set against an approaching train before authorising the wrong line movement. Better control it from a signal panel, albeit miles away, where the signaller can see what trains are where and is protected by solid state interlocking when he authorises his movements".¹¹⁶

Graham Harper

15th January 2025



¹¹⁶ Emails from Graham Harper on 13th and 16th December 2024 and 1st January 2025.

It's time to go. The train has already started its wiggle off the main line into platform No. 1. I should be able to make the train to get me back to the city. Luckily, it is a downhill fast jog from the Park Road overbridge.

THE END