

## Camberwell Railway Station Complex and Precinct, Cookson Street



**Study Grading:** B

**Precinct:** 30.01 **Streetscape:** 2

**Construction Date:** 1919

**First Owner:** Victorian Government

**Architect:** Harding, J W (Chief Architect)

### History

The Camberwell railway line opened on 3 April, 1882, as part of the line to Lilydale with later stations in Camberwell at Canterbury, East Camberwell and Chatham. In 1873 railway engineer-in-chief, Thomas Higinbotham, supported a circular rail link between Oakleigh and Spencer Street station, thus overcoming the problem of privately-owned rail lines between Oakleigh and the city. Despite government control over the private lines after 1878 and a new link between the Spencer Street and Flinders Street terminals, an Outer Circle lobby group continued to argue for a link through Camberwell from Oakleigh to the northern suburbs and then to Spencer Street. Work was completed on the line in 1890. By then it could attract few passengers or goods traffic. Various sections were closed for short periods and up to the early twentieth century the line failed to attract much traffic.

The first wave of rail electrification began with the Sandringham to Essendon route, open in 1919<sup>1</sup>. The main east-west line through Camberwell was electrified soon afterwards with associated grade-separation works and new station buildings. The contract for Camberwell station was let in September 1918, being part of the Malvern group of station designs<sup>2</sup>. This group included Armadale (1904), Hawksburn (1914), Caulfield and Toorak (1913): comparative analysis has judged Camberwell as 'important' with only Caulfield and Malvern being superior, as 'very important'<sup>3</sup> Of the

other railway stations in the city, Riversdale was a special design and also was judged as 'important'.

In 1925 the Outer Circle between Ashburton (the then southern terminal) and Camberwell was electrified. The northern section remained steam-powered and was thus discontinued. The Ashburton line was extended to Alamein after the Second World War and new traffic was attracted after the opening of the Golf Links Estate and a new station at Hartwell. However, the line is always on the short-list for closure whenever Victorian governments decide on cutting railway costs.

Steep gradients had meant slow journeys on the Camberwell line up to the First World War<sup>4</sup>. Following electrification, the line was lowered and ran from East Camberwell through to the Yarra River in a cutting. The new station and its approaches were designed to bring pedestrians down to the new level and to allow for a rail juncture with the Ashburton line.

### Description

The Camberwell Railway Precinct is bounded by Burke Road on the west, 'Railway Walk' on the south, the extended alignment of Thorn Street on the east and Cookson Street on the north. The significant elements within this precinct are:

1. Commercial buildings on Cookson Street (northern frontage).
2. Exotic plantings between northern station platform boundary and Cookson Street.
3. Network of pedestrian walkways extending from Cookson Street with descending access to northern platform, elevated walkway to island platforms and elevated booking office, elevated walkway to Railway Parade, Railway Walk.
4. Platforms and station buildings; elevated booking office; triple-tiered roofing and walkway leading to platform level. Platform work spaces; gateways and glass display cases on platforms.
5. Iron storage sheds to south of platforms.
6. Burke Road railway bridge.
7. Track work.

The main red brick and stucco station buildings are distinctive within the precinct because of the grade separation and the consequent unusual approaches (by ramps) and views afforded to the building. The roofline is exposed and picturesque with its arched and nested monitor roof forms and, under, the exposed lattice trusses and sheet-iron valences. The building's style follows its contemporaries and earlier, using the bungaloid tiled hip as the

<sup>1</sup> see Butler, Jolimont Car Sheds Conservation Analysis, for the Historic Buildings Council, 1985  
<sup>2</sup> Ward & Donnelly, Victoria's Railway Stations, 1981 Vol. 1  
<sup>3</sup> ibid.  
<sup>4</sup> see Allan

primary roof-form with parapet gables, with archways, set against it. As well as its style group examples, it resembles Heidelberg and Box Hill stations. All possess a visually dynamic form because of the grade separation and greater emphasis on roofline, ramp detailing and canopy design.

Nearby, the coal store is a large open corrugated-iron clad shed with a multi-gabled roofline.

#### Comparable Examples

Box Hill, Malvern, Caulfield, Heidelberg, Armadale and Toorak railway stations.

#### Landscape

It is assumed that as the route was electrified in c1919 and the cutting created, major landscaping works were carried out on most of the railway reserves although only remnants remain. Remnant examples of the style also occur in other municipalities, most notably Malvern, Caulfield, Flemington, and Jolimont (the selection of plants such as *Pinus canariensis* may reflect an earlier planting period, c1880s). Plants characteristic of these reserves and typical of those common plantings of the 1920s are *Phoenix canariensis*, *Agapanthus*, *Cotoneaster*, *Cupressus* sp., *Coprosma*, *Schinus molle* var. *areira*, Tamarisk, *Washingtonia filifera*, *Photinia*, and rows of *Cupressus torulosa*. These plants grew well on the generally dry, under-nourished soils, were self-sustaining and required minimal maintenance. They were moderately drought tolerant which explains their survival rate.

On the north side of the reserve (Cookson Street) planting of mixed exotic trees and shrubs dating from c1920 includes a row of *Phoenix canariensis* alternating with *Washingtonia filifera*, privet (*Ligustrum* spp.), *Agapanthus*, *cotoneaster*, oak (*Quercus* sp.), *Photinia*, *Coprosma*, pampas (*Cortaderia selloana*), tamarisk, *Prunus* spp., *Cupressus sempervirens* and *C. macrocarpa*.

On the southern side of the reserve, there is a little remnant planting on the embankment but the majority of the planting is recent and of a different character to the Edwardian style of Cookson Street.

The Edwardian character should be maintained and enhanced in future planting schemes.

#### Streetscape

The Cookson Street buildings, especially Davies Building (1-9) and the present Camberwell Antique Centre building (25-29) Cookson Street were constructed after the electrification of the line. Neighbouring structures have been identified as having individual significance in the 1986 City of Camberwell Conservation Study.

#### Significance

The buildings on the Cookson northern frontage form an important element in the townscape. They rise on a ridge and form a line facing south overlooking the station. These make a strong visual impression from the south and link station entrances to Burke Road. They reflect the historic role of the electrified railway in stimulating more intensive commercial land-use in the northern sections of Burke Road commercial district and introduced a wider range of commercial building form and activities to this part of the City.

The station design, the alteration of levels from Cookson Street to the platforms, the raised walkways, plantings and booking hall reflect the importance of the railway to suburban life in the age of electrification. The complexity of these structures and the pattern of pedestrian access contrast strongly with other parts of the suburb and with other less lavish station designs elsewhere in Camberwell.

Camberwell's growth in the 1880s depended essentially on the rail link with the city and a large part of renewed expansion after the Second World War depended on electrified rail lines. The Outer Circle was itself one of the most unusual rail developments in Victorian history and one of the most telling constructions of the 1880s railway expansion. The station precinct is an important reminder of the central importance of the initial railway and later electrification in the 1920s in shaping the character of Camberwell and in defining the commercial character of Burke Road.

#### Other Sources

Volume One: Camberwell Environmental History and Blainey, *History of Camberwell*.

#### Cloville Flats, 31-39 Cookson Street



Study Grading: C