

SYDNEY STATION

ST JAMES

STORIES

Text and Images by Chris Walters



The Sydney Station Stories article series looks at active railway stations around the Sydney region – their history, placement, design, precincts and current services.

This episode we're going underground, which means the big smoke! All the underground stations in the Sydney CBD have at least something going for them in terms of history and architectural intrigue, but arguably St James possesses the richest of these treasures. Step off a train at St James and take a look at the surprisingly cavernous space between the two platforms and you might well suspect that something odd is afoot. You'd be right, for there is as much going on here that is not immediately visible, as there is to be seen.

Located beneath the north-east corner of Hyde Park, St James is today a 'through station' served by Sydney Trains City Circle services coming in from and heading back out to the T2 Inner West and Leppington, T3 Bankstown, and T8 Airport and Southern lines. Platform 1 is adjacent to the 'City Inner' track for anti-clockwise trains heading out to Homebush, Parramatta and Leppington via Town Hall, Central and Strathfield while Platform 2 is served by the 'City Outer', for clock-wise services heading out via Museum and Central to the Airport, Campbelltown, Lidcombe and Liverpool. This will all change when the Bankstown line is closed for Metro conversion later this year, but more on that later.

Originally, however, St James was conceived as a busy interchange station and opened as a terminal in 1926, before the full City Circle line was completed between here and Town Hall via Circular Quay in January 1956. A key part of famed engineer, John Job Crew Bradfield's grand 20th Century vision for Sydney's suburban rail network, St James's rather

grandiose concourse was originally built to host four platforms; Platforms 1 and 4 (today known as Platform 2) were always intended to form part of the City Circle, while the original Platforms 2 and 3 were part of a stillborn Eastern-Western Suburbs railway that would have run from Bondi, through St James, Town Hall and out through the inner west along a route not too dissimilar from that now planned for the Metro West project. Although an Eastern Suburbs Railway did eventuate during June 1979, its route, design and construction did not align with Bradfield's original plan, and so Platforms 2 and 3 never hosted rails, let alone trains, and the central portions of both were 'filled in' during the 1990s, creating the open space you can see today.

However, while Bradfield's Eastern-Western Suburbs railway never came to pass, considerable preparation works were undertaken when the station was built in anticipation of it. Behind the locked doors in the area where Platform 2 and 3 once existed are tunnels – to the south, portions of Platforms 2 and 3 remain, and beyond them, first a short section of double-track width tunnel, followed by twin single-track width tunnels. These veer to the south east, diving beneath today's City Outer track and crossing above the Cross-City road tunnel to end near the corner of Liverpool and College Streets.

In the other direction, a double-track width tunnel heads out from the closed off, northern remnants of Platforms 2 and 3, past a pair of short, gated cross tunnels that used to link St James's original turn-back track to the City Circle lines, and out into a double-track width tunnel that veers north-west, threading between the current City Inner track overhead and the newer Eastern Suburbs Railway below. Because of the way in which the tunnel angles downgrade, decades of rainwater have collected in this tunnel at its far end, forming the somewhat famous Lake St James. This tunnel ends near Shakespeare Place and the State Library.



Left (page 40): Run 45-D from Ashfield arrives in Platform 2 with motor car C3545 leading the eight-car set, Tuesday 7 February 2023. Once this train completes a turn around the City Circle and reaches Central, it will work out of service until returning to take up additional runs during the afternoon peak.

Above: Run 40-K bound for Macarthur pauses alongside Platform 2 on Tuesday 16 May 2023.

Below: Eerily mirroring the current Platforms 1 and 2, the original Platform 3, despite appearances, has never hosted trains. Saturday 28 February 2016.



Between them, we are looking at around a kilometre of unused railway tunnels threading out from St James, running beneath Hyde Park and Macquarie Street. Which is not to say that all of St James's intrigue lies behind closed doors. Along with nearby Museum Station, St James – named for Sydney's oldest church located just north of the Hyde Park – is one of Sydney's many art-deco masterpieces. The pedestrian tunnels, concourses and platforms have been kept comparatively bright, with white tiling and green trim. The ornate brass railings and stairways complete the image of ornate nostalgia – which is to say that it is easier to perceive Sydney as it once was here, than it is at present-day Town Hall or Wynyard. The station still retains wooden gates and a little newsagent, and while they are no longer in use, the original ticket windows are all still in place too.

St James's location in the CBD's north-east makes it a handy place to alight for the Art Gallery of NSW, St Mary's Cathedral, St James Church, the Domain, Hyde Park and Hyde Park Barracks, among many other interesting destinations. Depending on your travel plans, try to build in a few spare minutes to take in the classic Elizabeth Street station entrance with its 1930s-style neon 'Chateau Tanunda Brandy' neon sign. Just beyond here are bus stops serving a multitude of inner western and eastern suburbs routes. The smaller station entrance facing Macquarie Street is probably handier for the 'big ticket' tourist destinations mentioned earlier, and while it looks like a station entrance, the nearby stairwell opposite St Marys Cathedral on Prince Albert Road provides access not to St James, but the Domain Express Walkway. This is the longest moving walkway in the Southern Hemisphere, which (when it works) provides quick access to the nearby Domain Carpark.

In terms of trains you'll see passing through St James, it goes without saying that the A and B Set Waratahs dominate most T2, T3 and T8 services, although M Set Millenniums can also be seen here, more so on weekdays than weekends. St James is also a handy place to see the 'endangered' 1980s

K Sets during the morning (pre-9:00am) and afternoon (post-3:30pm), when they are most commonly in operation. To see a K Set running through St James is a little bit of a 'throwback' sight worth checking out while you can.

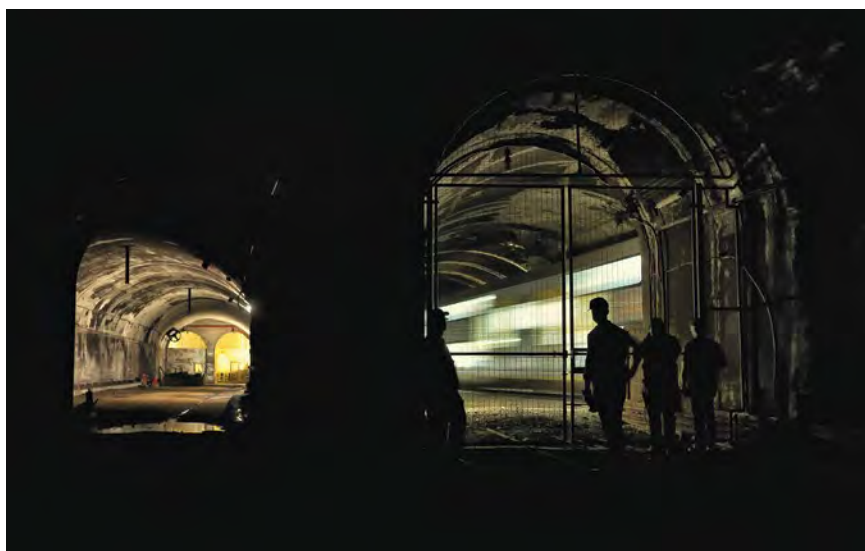
When St James opened, it was the terminus for trains from Sutherland and over the years the various 'outer reaches' of the network that have fed the City Circle has chopped and changed quite a bit, and it is about to change once again. When the Bankstown Line is closed between Sydenham and Bankstown for Metro conversion later this year, the City Circle feeder trains will alter once again, with a return to Liverpool-City via Regents Park trains being reintroduced. This will create a bit of an imbalance of services coming in from the south-west, and it remains to be seen just how the Sydney Trains timetable will be adjusted to compensate for this.

Next: Blacktown

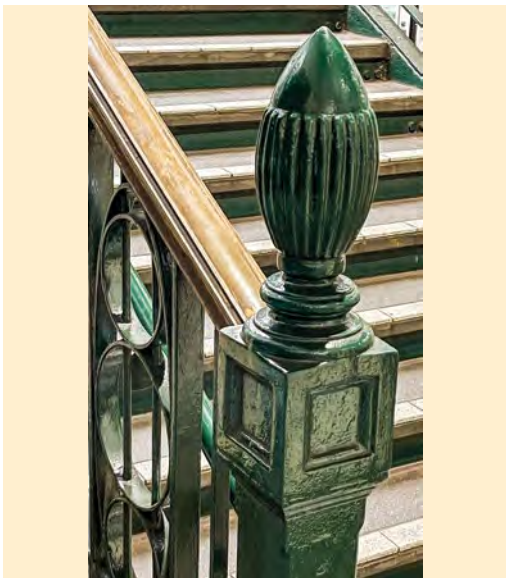
Quick facts

Distance from Sydney Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.4 kilometres (via Town Hall) • 1.3 kilometres (via Museum)
Elevation	Rails are approximately 22 metres above sea level and 12 metres below the street
Opened	20 December 1926
Departures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekday: approximately 280 in each direction • Weekend: approximately 250 in each direction

With thanks to John Hoyle for his assistance in preparing this article.



Above left: Beneath Macquarie Street, the aborted Western Suburbs Railway tunnel is now home to 'Lake St James'. Despite the torch light illumination here, the scene is usually pitch dark. Saturday 28 February 2016.
Left: On the left are the northern remnants of the original Platforms 2 and 3. On the right, a train heads north along the City Outer bound for Circular Quay while a group of rail workers look on, standing in what used to be a cross tunnel linking with the former St James turn-back, behind and to the left of the photographer. The St James turn-back has been out of use since 1993. Saturday 28 February 2016.
Above: The Chateau Tanunda Brandy neon sign above the Elizabeth Street station entrance, Wednesday 8 February 2023



Clockwise, from above: Brass fittings and green lining are a feature of St James' nostalgic charm. Tuesday 10 October 2023 • A modern view from between the former Platforms 2 and 3 showing current station set-up, but with the former platform edges still visible in the floor. Tuesday 16 May 2023. • The City Circle stations host a number of 'London Underground' style roundel station signs, Tuesday 16 May 2023. • White tile and green trim are in evidence right throughout the concourse, platforms and pedestrian tunnels. Nearby Museum Station is similarly fitted out, although it features maroon trim. Tuesday 10 October 2023. • Although no longer in use, the original ticket windows at St James are still a visual feature for visitors. Tuesday 10 October 2023. • Alcoves along both current Platforms 1 and 2 have been fitted out with historic displays telling the story of St James and the City Circle. This particular display outlines some of Bradfield's original vision for Sydney's suburban railways. Tuesday 16 May 2023. • The Elizabeth Street station gate and newsagent at St James, illustrating today's compromises between traditional design and modern functionality. Tuesday 10 October 2023.

