

Ian Forman (1949 -)

Como Bridge 2008

Oil on board

Como Railway Bridge opened in December 1885 as part of the Illawarra line linking Hurstville with the south. This heritage listed bridge is a rare example of a single-track iron lattice girder bridge, and certainly the longest in NSW.

Bottlenecks on the bridge led to its replacement in 1972 by a new two-track bridge built alongside. In 1985 the old bridge was reopened to pedestrians and cyclists.

This painting was kindly donated to Sutherland Shire Historical Society by the artist in 2018.

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Como was not the first choice of the NSW Railways Engineer-in-Chief, John Whitton for a bridge crossing the Georges River. His preferred location was at Tom Ugly's Point. However, a group of land speculators demanded an exorbitant price for the right of way of the railway over their land. Others used political pressure to have the railway diverted to a more difficult terrain over the Hurstville Ridge. So in the end the railway was built over the more difficult route to Oatley and over the railway bridge to Como.

Also, the government refused the money needed for a double-track bridge, and the single rail track meant huge bottlenecks as trains waited to cross the bridge. The bridge was replaced in 1972 by a two-track reinforced concrete bridge immediately to the west. In 1985 the original bridge was reopened as a cycleway, giving a great deal of enjoyment to cyclists and pedestrians alike.

Shire's water supply

Another function of the Como Railway Bridge was to carry a pipeline bringing water 27 kms from the Woronora Dam (opened in 1942) to the reservoirs in Penshurst – and to the Shire.

From very early on Como attracted visitors for its beauty, boating and recreational opportunities. James Murphy, manager of the Holt Sutherland Company created a pleasure ground on the headland near the railway bridge, and the Como Hotel was built in 1890. Murphy is also credited with changing the district's name from 'Woronora' to 'Como' because it reminded him of Lake Como in Italy).

Did the bridge bring with it settlers to Como?

Despite the attraction Como had for holidaymakers – and many made use of the train service - the new railway line and the railway station right near the recreational facilities did not bring in the settlers until after World War I.

References:

- <https://www.sydneywater.com.au/>
- Extract from 'The Railwayman' by Eric Jehan. *House Journal of the N.S.W. Government Railways*, republished in *SSHS Bulletin*, April 1972