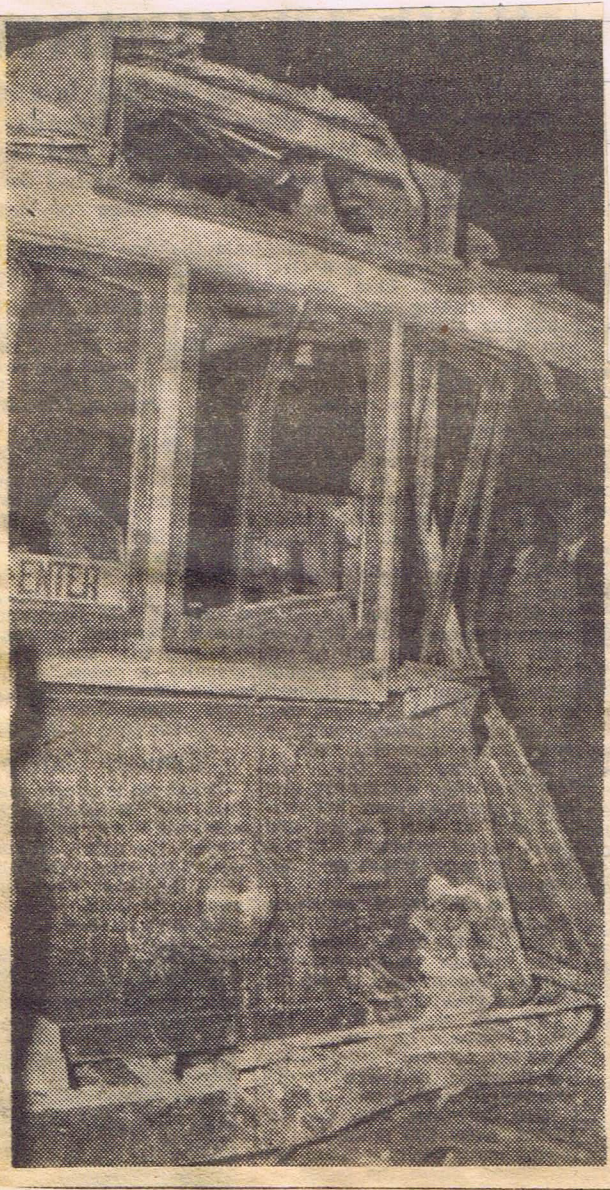


SMASHES.

N° 24

6.30pm. on 8th May 1954.



Left: The undamaged head-lamp is the odd thing out on the badly damaged front of the runaway tram. This picture was taken after the tram had been hauled clear of the hotel building.

8-5-54

A lone woman sat terrified in a runaway tram which careered down Sturt street about 6.30 on Saturday evening, jumped the tram points at the intersection of Sturt and Grenville streets, hurtled fifty yards across Grenville street, bounded on to a footpath, and crashed through a brick wall into the office of the Buck's Head Hotel.

The woman, Mrs. Johanna Margaret Cochrane, of 6 Grey street, Ballarat East, escaped with a shaking and shock while the nine-year-old grandson of the hotel licensee, Mr Charles Cameron, escaped death by seconds for the second time in seven weeks.

The boy, Donald Cameron, on March 20 narrowly missed death when he was downstairs instead of being in his usual room, an upstairs sleepout, which crashed into Bridge street after a truck had struck a verandah post.

On Saturday night, the boy had gone into the office, which is adjacent to the Grenville street entrance to the hotel, to light a fire. He left to get some matches, and seconds later the tram crashed through the wall. It came to rest with its smashed-in front pressed up against the other side wall.

Police were told that the tram had been a runaway, and had apparently been left unattended at the Lydiard and Sturt streets terminal. It was the 6.28 p.m. tram for Mt. Pleasant.

Within minutes of the crash, a tramwayman, Mr Frank Callahan, hurried to the scene, and after making numerous inquiries, appeared to be on the verge of collapsing.

He was assisted into the hotel, where he rested. He later left, accompanied by other tramwaymen, and went to the tramways' Sturt street office.

Mrs Cochrane, who was assisted from the tram by a young man, was also taken into the hotel where she rested.

Mrs Cochrane showed great foresight for she was said to have been seated in the centre compartment of the tram.

As the tram moved off and sped down the rather steep incline just above "The Courier" office she made her way to the rear compartment of the lurching vehicle, closed the dividing door and sat and waited.

Twenty-two-year old Bill Pfeiffer, of 3 Barkly street, Ballarat, said that with a friend he was seated on a motor cycle near Rockman's corner, when he heard the noise of a speeding vehicle.

Something Hurling

"I looked across and saw something hurtling down the other side of Sturt street. It was speeding, and suddenly it shot off across the street, and bounced when it hit the gutter," Pfeiffer said.

"I jumped off my bike and raced over. A lady was sitting on the rear right-hand side seat, crying 'Let me out. Let me out.' I pushed the door open and helped her out," he added.

Pfeiffer said he thought the driver was still in the tram, so he made his way to the cab, and in the front compartment he stumbled over broken fittings and bricks which had crashed in.

"It was full of dust, and I had to grope around in the dust and bricks to see if the driver were lying on the floor, but he wasn't there," he stated.

Inside the hotel, the licensee was in the dining room having dinner. His grandsons, Donald and Ian, 7, had already had their tea, and were in the lounge. Donald had gone to light the office fire, and left the room to get a match when the crash occurred.

"All of a sudden I heard a loud thud and racing along the passageway I was showered with bits of plaster," Mr Cameron said.

The wall dividing the passageway from the office had a great bulge in it, and the plaster wallboard had cracked and broken away.

His son, Mr. Donald Cameron, father of the two boys,

said the first he knew was a crashing sound and his son's screams.

"I immediately thought that young Donald was trapped in the office, but when I reached the scene I found him standing in the hallway, leading to the lounge, screaming from fright," he added.

The path of the tram from the time it left the rails near the junction, was discernable by scoring in the bitumen roadway. When it bounced up onto the footpath its bogey tore deep holes in the bitumen surface.

Apart from the remarkable escapes of Mrs Cochrane and Donald Cameron, it was most fortunate that there was no vehicular or pedestrian traffic in the immediate vicinity of Sturt street-Grenville street area at the time of the crash.

Crowds Gather

Hundreds of people making their way to Saturday night entertainments stopped to inspect the scene, and many waited for almost three hours until the tram was hauled away. At times the crowd grew to more than 500.

First efforts to haul the tram away failed. A double-bogey tram had been brought to the junction, and a 50-yard cable hooked between it and the damaged tram. However, despite the placing of sand on the rails for the hauling tram's wheels to grip the effort failed.

The heavy four-wheel drive RACV truck was then hooked to the damaged tram by a short cable. The truck and the large tram then attempted a haul, but the truck cable snapped.

A heavier cable was then employed, and by a series of short, sharp pulls by both vehicles, the tram was hauled off the footpath. It was then dragged to the tramline junction.

The inside of the hotel office was a shamble, although by some strange piece of good fortune a large mirror and some ornaments on a mantle-piece were undamaged.

The telephone hung on the far wall, also apparently undamaged, while seconds after the tram had been hauled clear someone climbed in over the debris and switched on the office light.



This graphic picture taken a short while after the crash, shows rubble and masonry piled on the roof of the tram and at the side. Brewery and tramway employees later climbed on to the roof of the tram and removed the rubble in case it fell and injured any person.

8/5/54