

FARES PLEASE!

February 2008

News from the Ballarat Tramway Museum

Our Trams in Another Era



Appearing in *SEC News* in September 1942 this photo was headed “Our First Conductresses”. The caption read “These three ladies, the Commission’s first conductresses to complete their training period, are now on duty on the Ballarat trams. They are (L. to R. Mesdams E. A Jakobi, J. L. Wightwick and M. C. Browne”. This month we look at the short era of female tramway traffic staff in SEC service in Ballarat. *Photo: BTM collection*

Ballarat Trams are Ballarat History

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Top left: Jean Maxwell in 1981

Top right: Jean Maxwell in 1942

Left: Ballarat Conductresses as seen in *SEC News* Christmas 1942. Jean is in the back row, far right.

Bottom left: Alan Snowball reconditioning No 14's brake rigging 21/12/07

All photos from the BTM collection

Bottom right: Neville Hesketh (right), our new recruit at work with Len Millar at St Aidans Drive

Photo: Richard Gilbert 17/2/08



Vale Jean Maxwell

Ballarat lost another link to its tramway past when one of the last surviving female Ballarat Conductresses from the SEC era, Jean Maxwell passed away on 27 December 2007 aged ninety one. She joined the tramways in 1942 and worked until 1946. She was the last Conductress to leave the tramways. Jean was well known to the early workers at the Museum. Her first husband died as a prisoner of war. She later married returned serviceman and tram driver Arthur Maxwell. Arthur, who passed away some years ago, rose to become Senior Traffic Inspector for the SEC. When the tram system closed Arthur and Jean took the lease of the tearooms in the gardens, then known as "Lake Lodge". They later ran a milk bar on the corner of Humffray and Mair Sts Ballarat East

Warren Doubleday notes that the last time he met Jean Maxwell was at a talk he gave to Pleasant St Baptist Ladies Fellowship during August 2006. Jean although frail, was lively and asked how "Barney Banana" was going. Barney Banana? – oh yes of course Gavin Young who would often call in at the Maxwell's Milk Bar and have his favourite ice cream – a Barney Banana.

During the development of the Museum's tramway operations, Arthur was invaluable when we sought advice. The Museum's DVD features an interview with Jean and Arthur recorded in the 1980s. Jean's passing has inspired the feature article by Alan Bradley in this month's *Fares Please*. An obituary appeared in *The Courier* on 2 January 2008.

An item and interview with our tram driver, Len Millar, was shown on WIN TV

on New Year's night and an article in *The Courier* about the Museum followed on 4 January 2008.

This was followed on 28 January 2008 by a "Monday Profile" in *The Courier* of Jeanne Ward. Jeanne is now eighty six. She also worked as a Conductress during the war although she was forced to take a break when she became pregnant. When she returned to work after her son was born she took a second job nursing and maintained the two jobs until the men returned from the war and wanted their jobs back. She used to relieve her days on the trams by riding the Museum's trams. "I used to go down on a Sunday, quite often, and have a ride – just for old time's sake".

2008 Begonia Festival

The Museum has been invited to take part and the Festival has again offered to sponsor the provision of tram services within the Gardens so that they can be free.

We are proud to continue our long association with the Festival. A minimum of two bogie trams will operate between 9:30am and 6:00pm for the three days of the Festival which will be held from the 8th to the 10th of March.

Vale Lewis Nyman

After some time suffering from ill health, former long time member Canon Lewis Nyman passed away at Wangaratta on New Year's Day aged seventy three. He attended a number of conferences and was a well known tram enthusiast, as well as an Army and Police Chaplain.

Ballarat Tramway Conductresses

By Alan Bradley

Introduction

During 1981 I conducted my first two interviews for my proposed book on the Ballarat tramways. The first interview was with former Inspector Arthur Maxwell. The second was with his wife, Jean Maxwell, who had been a conductress several decades previously. The interview was so good that several quotes from it were used in the book *“The Golden City and its Tramways”*.

This article pays tribute to the contribution made by Jean Maxwell and other tram conductresses in Ballarat. Quotations are from an interview held with Jean on 11 November 1981.

Women’s work

World War 2 was declared on 3 September 1939. Petrol rationing was introduced in October 1940, and was gradually tightened until motorists could only drive 1000 miles per year. In December 1941 Japan entered the war, and Australia was now under direct attack.

Ballarat was subject to “brownouts” which meant reduced street lighting, no shop lights and neon signs, and the turning off of the Town Hall lights after 9 pm. Trams had shades placed on headlights, funnels placed on interior lights, and white paint on bumper bars. To assist passengers in locating their whereabouts in darkened streets conductors were expected to call the street name whenever a stop was made.

The three SEC tram systems in Ballarat,

Bendigo and Geelong experienced heavy increase in patronage due to petrol rationing and increased activity of local industries for the war effort. In Bendigo the building of an ordnance factory led to the building of an extension from Lake Weeroona.

In Ballarat a camp was set up in Victoria Park (in Sturt Street West) for 5,000 American troops who were totally dependent on trams for transport. Under these conditions Ballarat tramway patronage soared from 2.7 million in 1939 to an all-time high 6.4 million in 1943. The Ballarat tramways even made a profit in 1943, for the first time under SEC ownership.

Some tramway men (including Arthur Maxwell) enlisted, while some others (like Herb Knight) were rejected for medical reasons. With the severe manpower shortage caused by the war, the Federal Government encouraged women to enter the workforce. The SEC employed women as lift drivers, chauffeurs, meter readers, cashiers and clerks. Conductresses were employed on its three tramway systems in Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong.

Initially there was resistance by the tramways union to the use of conductresses. In September 1941 when their use was proposed in Melbourne (for the first time in Australia), the tramways union executive had claimed that women were “physically and psychologically unsuited” for tramway work.¹

The union even asked the Federal Minister for Manpower to treat tramways as a reserved occupation, so that the employment of conductresses would not be necessary. However the M&MTB had already lost many men to the services, and it had been impossible to obtain suitable male recruits. A trial of thirty two conductresses in Melbourne was successful. The verdict was that “there is no alternative to employing women, and they are carrying out their duties efficiently”. Thus there was no reason to reserve tram and bus employees.²

When the SEC proposed employing conductresses the local Geelong tramways union branch claimed that owing to the single tracks and the numerous loops and curves, women would find it difficult to keep their balance. The Ballarat branch of the union wanted all avenues of male employment to be explored before women were employed. However the union executive now admitted that the 400 conductresses now working in Melbourne were “a Godsend” because they had relieved the pressure on the men. The union executive consented to their employment by the SEC – but only to fare collection, and not to driving trams.³

Ballarat’s first three conductresses (EA Jakobi, JL Wightwick and MC Brown) commenced work in June 1942. The maximum number employed in Ballarat at any one time was 23, although 33 were employed over a four year period. All of them were the wives of servicemen, and four were wives of tramway men.

During the war wages for women taking over male occupations was set at no less than 60% and no more than 100% of the

male rate. Where women received equal wages it was generally to women in service industries who interacted with the public. The M&MTB and SEC conductresses received the equivalent of the male wage.

Jean Maxwell left her previous job at Morley’s Mill to become one of the first twelve conductresses. After mailing in her application for employment, and being accepted, she went in to collect her green uniform. The jacket fitted her, but not the skirt, so she had to alter it herself so she could start work. She recalled the reaction of some men towards conductresses:

We got abused occasionally because we were doing men’s work. They’d say “Why don’t you go home and look after your husband?” They had the wrong argument, because we all had husbands away...I think we all had a couple of occasions like that. On the whole the men accepted us very well. When they realised there were going to be girls on during the war they accepted it. I only had three incidents the whole time I was on the trams, where I was told to go home and look after my family and look after my husband.

Jean’s first husband, George Cheney, was with the first AIF troops in the Pacific Theatre of the war. He was taken prisoner by the Japanese early in 1942, and later died in a prisoner of war camp in New Britain [now known as Rabaul]. Jean recalled: “About 120 escaped from New Britain. My first husband was with them but he never got out from there. Some of the boys told me. Officially I didn’t know he had died, but I did because the boys had told me”.

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On the trams

Jean Maxwell recalled: “Cars were very few because of petrol rationing. You got up Sturt Street, and Mr Morshead and Mr Curwen-Walker, all the business people who were wealthy enough to own cars, they all used to travel on the trams”.

Trams were crowded at most times during the day, and especially during the evening peak. During the evening trams were crowded by people travelling to and from Ballarat’s four cinemas, and by soldiers travelling to and from Victoria Park. On Monday mornings conductresses were busy issuing weekly tickets. Even on Sundays trams were crowded, as people bought tourist tickets and rode on the various lines. At busy times passengers had to find room where they could, even on bumper bars and running boards. This heavy loading was handled entirely by single truck trams, as bogie cars were not received until after the war finished.

Jean Maxwell recalled that her least favourite run was run No. 22. This involved a trip on the Sturt Street West line to Hamilton Avenue, change the pole and destination sign, then return along Sturt Street, turn into Lydiard Street, change the points at the Post Office, change the pole and destination sign again, then return to Hamilton Avenue. After several trips up and down along the Sturt Street West line there was a short meal break of 30 minutes, then more duty on the Sebastopol line (the busiest in Ballarat).

With few taxis available, marines from the American camp at Victoria Park were frequent travellers. They paid penny fares, compared to threepence for civilians.

Conductresses found their cash bags weighed down with pennies, which were much heavier than threepences. Local children would board the trams and ask marines for money or cartons of cigarettes.

The presence of the “Yanks” brought as well the white-helmeted Military Police (MPs). Jean Maxwell recalled that if there was a “closed camp” the MPs wandered the streets looking for absentees. One marine boarded a tram, and Jean saw some MPs waiting at a stop. The marine hid under a seat, while Jean told the MPs there were no marines onboard. Afterwards she told the marine how to make it to camp via the back way.

Jean Maxwell recalled another time when she was conductor on a tram. A marine was misbehaving and two MPs were whirling their batons in an attempt to restore order. Jean told the MPs that she was in charge of the tram and asked them to leave. They left, to the cheers of the marines onboard.

After the marines left Ballarat their camp became a convalescent camp for Australian soldiers. Jean Maxwell recalled that servicemen recovering from malaria would sometimes stagger and fall off their seat. This brought unkind remarks from female passengers that they were drunk. The conductresses would assist them to the main gate at Victoria Park. Convalescent patients from the Military Hospital at Lakeside Mental Hospital, some of them missing arms and legs, travelled on trams with their crutches and walking sticks.

A common problem for conductresses was the drunken passenger. Jean Maxwell recalled:

I'd say about 99% of the drunks that got on my tram I was able to handle. I never had any bother with them. If they got a bit funny I was able to talk to them and calm them down. But you'd have to be careful. Passengers would make it harder for you if you had a drunk on a tram. One day a policeman got on a tram. Somebody was swearing on the tram, and he was drunk, and he told him to shut up. If the policeman had shut up and let me calm him down there wouldn't have been any trouble.

Conductresses had to travel to and from the tram depot in Wendouree Parade, a long way from where some of them lived. If they finished a shift at night they had to find their way home in the darkened streets. They tolerated long hours and cancellation of days off. Jean Maxwell recalled:

We used to work thirteen out of fourteen weekends. Dear Mr James [Inspector Fred James], I could tell by looking at him. I'd say "You can't ask me to work, because I'm not going to". He'd say: "Do you think you could tomorrow? I know it's your day off". "No Mr James, I can't do it tomorrow". Finally I'd say yes, I don't think I turned him down. I couldn't say no to old Freddy. I got tired of working on Saturday nights though.

During the war everyday items like food and clothing were rationed. Owing to overcrowding of trams stockings only lasted a short time "before becoming laddered and useless for further wear".

Due to a shortage of coupons many conductresses were thus forced to work without stockings and felt the effects of the cold. The union applied for further stocking coupons to be issued to conductresses employed by the M&MTB and SEC, but the request was refused.⁴

The birthday party

The anniversary of the appointment of the first conductresses was marked by a "birthday party" at Electra Hall in Camp Street on 20 September 1943. Various SEC officials (such as the Ballarat Branch Manger and Tramway Superintendent) attended the function, along with the twenty three conductresses and many of the tramway men. The "*Ballarat Courier*" noted: "The party given at the Electra Hall was, in the opinion of the conductresses, more than a hospitable gesture; it was a public admission on the part of the motormen that the girls were doing a man's job like men, and what women in a man's job could ask for more".⁵

One of the conductresses told the "*Courier*" that male passengers "were unfailing in courtesy and kindness and always ready to help". However many female passengers did not appreciate that they were working to a timetable, and kept the conductresses waiting while they searched through various bags and purses for a coin. Others would travel in peak periods and spread baskets and parcels around their feet for other passengers to trip over.

Some women also attempted to emulate men in hopping on and off moving cars. Being less expert at this technique, they risked injury. Another conductress said

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that she enjoyed working in a crowded tram, but wished that passengers would move into the saloons rather than herding in the platforms. She noted that men preferred to stand on the platforms, but women were causing congestion by standing on platforms when there was clearly seating space in the saloon.⁶

The Popular Conductress competition

An important part of the war effort was the raising of patriotic funds. During 1944 a fund-raising competition was held amongst the conductresses from depots throughout Victoria, to support the Red Cross Prisoner of War Fund. Ballarat conductress Mrs Sylvia Mitchell engaged in various fund-raising events included concerts, dances, boxing, wrestling and dog racing. Mrs Mitchell even interviewed a repatriated prisoner of war on radio station 3BA. More money rolled in after this interview.

The most prominent fundraiser was the miniature “Treasure Tram”. This was filled with toys, clothing, toiletries and other items (some hard to obtain because of rationing) and used as the first prize in a raffle. The “Treasure Tram” was exhibited in Ballarat, Clunes and Maryborough, and raised £998.

The result of the competition was announced on 31 August 1944. The top three place getters were SEC conductresses. Sylvia Mitchell was the winner, raising £3580 out of the total of £15,076. For the record the finishing order was: Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo, Kew, Camberwell, Central Bus, Hanna Street, Preston, Brunswick, Malvern, M&MTB Head Office, Port Melbourne.⁷

After raising £998 for the Ballarat effort the “Treasure Tram” was exhibited in Bendigo, and was later presented to the Bendigo Base Hospital.⁸

The war ends

World War 2 ended on 15 August 1945. Two months later Ballarat gained its first bogie trams, two former M&MTB trams of the Hawthorn Tramways Trust type. Jean recalled: “They were better than the smaller trams to work on. They were harder to connie – they’d all queue up and you’d have two in the back and a packed load up the front. You’d have to be very tactful. Sebas people were the worst for that, they were like a lot of sheep. I said ‘One gets in the front and you all step in the front. Get inside, you make my job too hard’”.

With the war over it took some time to return all servicemen to their pre-war jobs, but as the boys came home many women lost their wartime jobs. In Melbourne the tramways union protested as thirty conductresses were dismissed to make way for returning servicemen.⁹ This did not happen in Ballarat. By February 1946 only three conductresses remained on the job. No resignations had been asked for. The rate of conductresses leaving had fitted in “very conveniently” with the return of ex-servicemen.¹⁰ The last two were Kaye Denmead and Jean Maxwell, both of them war widows.

Jean Maxwell was the last to leave, in August 1946. By now all except one ex-serviceman had been “demobbed” and had returned to their former positions. The travelling public expressed regret for the passing of conductresses. Women praised their helpfulness with the aged and mothers

with young children. Men thought “they brought brightness to the job but at the same time you couldn’t get away without paying your fare while they were around”.

From the SEC’s viewpoint the great influx of American and Australian troops had made their job difficult, but “being women they had exercised a repressive effect on servicemen that considerably helped the situation”.¹¹

Arthur Maxwell returned from the war, married Ballarat’s last conductress and rose through the ranks to become Senior Traffic Inspector. Conductresses came back on to Melbourne’s trams, and from 1976 onwards women were permitted to drive trams. However Jean Maxwell remained the last woman to work on the Ballarat tramways.

Looking back

Jean Maxwell recalled that while people regarded her as a talker, she was more quiet prior to working on the trams. Clearly her experiences as a conductress forced her to become more assertive in certain situations.

Community attitudes to female workers are very different from what they were during the early 1940s. The employment of conductresses was strongly opposed in some quarters, and was only allowed because there was no alternative. There was no possibility they would be allowed to drive trams. However the Ballarat conductresses proved their worth, as they did in many tramway systems throughout the world. The work of women during World War 2 in transport, munitions and other essential industries opened the door for female workers in later decades.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the SEC had difficulty in keeping the tram system fully staffed, due to the impending closure of the system. The re-employment of conductresses seems not to have been considered as an option. The undoubted qualities that conductresses brought to the job would have been of great benefit to the SEC in running its post-war tram system.

The last word on conductresses comes from former motorman Herb Knight, who told me in an interview: however they quickly proved their worth “I’ve said it lots of times, they were as good to work with as any man”.

References:

- ¹. Melbourne *Age* 9 September 1941
- ². Memo, Dept of Labour & National Service to Director of Manpower Priorities Board, 2 December 1941; memo Director of Manpower Priorities Board to Dept of Labour & National Service 16 January 1942 (both from Commonwealth Archives)
- ³. Geelong Secretary to General Secretary AT&MOEA 6 April 1942; General Secretary AT&MOEA Divisional Secretaries Ballarat, Bendigo & Geelong 20 April 1942; Ballarat Secretary to Divisional Secretary ATMOEA 6 May 1942.
- ⁴. General secretary AT&MOEA to Rationing Commission 1 June 1944; memo Director to Deputy Director Rationing Commission 28 August 1944
- ⁵. Ballarat *Courier* 29 September 1943
- ⁶. *ibid*
- ⁷. *SEC News* October 1944, p. 10
- ⁸. Ballarat *Courier* 27 December 1944
- ⁹. Melbourne *Age* 13 February 1946
- ¹⁰. Ballarat *Courier* 12 February 1946
- ¹¹. *ibid* 3 August 1946.

New Members

The Museum welcomes the following resumed member:

243 Leslie Coghill of Waterloo, NSW.

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In the Workshop

Our small workshops team continue to be very busy. Led by Dave Macartney, our weekday workers Pete, Phillip and Trevor are supported by Daniel after school and Alastair when he is not driving for *Yarra Trams*. Alan Snowball provides much of the heavy engineering toil. In the absence of Garry Wood who is busy building a new house, Warren Doubleday with the assistance of Alastair has ensured that all tram and infrastructure inspections are up to date.

Jobs completed recently include the testing and tagging of all our electrical appliances by our electrician, Paul Mong, the completion of No 14's truck, the replacement of a worn out trolley wheel on No 13 and the preparation of a bracket arm to replace a bent one near depot junction. A recent couple of wet days, a rarity in recent times, revealed serious leaks in the motorman's windows on Nos. 13 and 33. These were resealed and repainted.

The "temporary" advertising signs added to the horse tram some years ago for its visit to Melbourne were finally removed, revealing the more historic ones underneath.

A motor and armature swap has been arranged with the Bendigo Tramways. As previously reported, one of No 14's armatures was found to require complete rewiring. Bendigo Tramways had two restored suitable armatures and Ballarat two MV101 motors which are not suitable for our use and which can be used in Bendigo. The armatures will be checked and installed in our motors by DBB in Melbourne. When this is complete and the

motors are reinstalled No 14 can be made mobile again and No 28 lifted so that a defective field coil can be replaced.

The motor swap is not an ideal solution because this can only be a one off means to resolve the problem of aging armatures and the cost of rewinding them.

Big Pete has finished restoration of the three street lights by stripping them back to bare copper. These were donated twenty years ago by a sympathetic SEC employee who had just removed them from Lydiard Street, where they had hung since 1938. They are extremely attractive and too valuable to hang outside. so a home will have to be found somewhere inside the shed. They will also need to be converted from DC to 240 volts AC.

Five new sleepers were installed on the depot side of the king points, replacing a few which had ceased to contribute, and making for a smoother ride through here from the new shed. Daniel thought he was pretty good at driving dog spikes until he saw Philip, with 28 years in the railway Way and Works Branch behind him, belt a spike home with just three mighty blows.

The fleet achieved 100% reliability during the summer. Over thirty four days of continuous operation not one changeover was required. A remarkable turnaround occurred when No. 27 required a bearing to be remetalled after many years of hard running. It was out of service for only eleven days.

Clear plastic weather blinds have been acquired for No. 661, and some have been fitted. This is a particularly challenging and frustrating exercise. When complete

the blinds will make the drop centre area of the tram far more attractive for travellers in inclement weather. It is intended to also fit clear blinds to No 671.

Work on rebuilding the display area is continuing slowly.

Previously acquired shelving is to be erected along the rear three bays of the south wall. To support these shelves a concrete floor is required and after many barrow loads of fill, concrete has been poured. A concrete floor has also been provided across the back of the shed from the main rear door. The cost was some \$3,000. Unlike the Sydney Tramway Museum, we do not have the on call human resources to deal with any free surplus arrangement.

Safety Regulation

In November 2007, the NSW Rail Regulator sought comment on a paper titled “*Safety Regulation of Heritage Railway Operators*”. Warren Doubleday, Chairman of COTMA, reports that COTMA has worked closely with the Association of Tourist and Heritage Rail Australia on a response. The paper discusses the barriers that Heritage Rail Operators encounter in trying to meet the ever increasing demands of the regulators and the problems of representation by umbrella bodies, particularly in NSW.

Tramway Museums that operate heritage vehicles are faced with the same barriers. Copies of the submissions are available on the COTMA and the ATHRA (www.athra.asn.au) web sites. One of the concepts that was put forward by ATHRA was a “Deemed to Comply” safety system in lieu of the existing regulatory system.

This follows the Building Industry regulatory system. Overbearing regulation is robbing Museum personnel of the time that should be put into either preparing funding submissions, working on restoration etc.

The continued existence of heritage rail organisations is threatened purely because of the impact of these regulations on the few that have the skills to prepare such documents and the resultant volunteer burnout.

COTMA along with ATHRA is trying to mitigate the effects of these ever increasing demands. It is slow going, but some headway has been made.

The BTM has responded to an invitation to all heritage operators by the National Transport Commission to assist in a survey of the impact of the proposed competency assessment requirements found in the national *Rail Safety Bill 2006*.

The aim of this survey is to:

- understand the nature and extent of the compliance burden associated with requirements relating to the use of registered training organisations (RTOs);
- propose the nature of assistance that may be provided to the T&H rail sector such as assistance through the industry association, rail safety regulators, government; and/or
- identify grounds for any amendment to this provision of the national model Bill.

We hope that a strong response from the various heritage operators around Australia will lead to a redrafting of the legislation.

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2008 COTMA Conference

Planning for the 2008 COTMA conference to be held in Launceston is continuing. The Conference opening will be on Friday 21 August 2008 in Launceston and it will finish with the General Meeting on Tuesday 26 August. A post conference

tour finishes in Hobart on the weekend of 30 – 31 August. This tour will include visits to the Wee Georgie Wood railway, the West Coast Wilderness Railway and Hobart. Details can be found at: <http://www.cotma.org.au> and follow the links



Dave Macartney, Phillip Work and Daniel Edwards take a moment from hammering dog spikes into the new sleepers they have inserted into the access track.

Photo: Richard Gilbert 4/2/08



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