

Interview – runaway into Bucks Head Hotel 1954 By Alan Bradley

On 10 July 2017 I interviewed Terry Hore and his mother, Patricia Hore by speaker phone. Terry had emailed the museum seeking “info about a runaway tram incident when an unattended tram in Sturt St ran down the hill and derailed at the bottom and crashed into a pub”. The tram had his grandmother inside.

Terry’s grandmother was Mrs Johanna Cochrane. She was a nursing aid at the Benevolent Home off Drummond Street North. That evening Nan came off the late shift and took the tram for her normal journey to “Stones corner” (the corner of Main and Bridge Streets) to her home in Grey Street. Just after 10 pm the tram ran down the hill. She was in the end seating, and she braced herself near the doorway. She said that the tram made a noise and went through the wall of the pub, but she wasn’t injured.

The publican in the hotel was seriously rebuffed when he offered Nan (a serious teetotaler) a nip of brandy to “calm her nerves”, but she said “Liquor will never touch my lips” (even though she had worked in hotels herself). There were a few surprised and shocked after-hours drinkers behind closed doors, as this was the era of six o’clock closing. Patricia and her husband (who were based at the RAAF Base at Ballarat Airport) heard about the accident on Radio 3BA and came to the city afterwards. Terry was about a year old at the time.

Nan would have been lost without the tram service, which she used every day to go to and from work. Later she moved to Clyde Street, on the Lydiard Street North line.

Nan was born in 1905, so she would have been 49 when the runaway tram incident occurred. She was single at the time, and lived to be 93. Terry and Patricia along with others in the family all had suffered a serious tongue lashing from their 5 feet 2 inch Nan at one time or another. In later years when she saw long haired men down the street she would tell them to “get your bloody hair cut”.

I gave Terry and Patricia details of the runaway tram incident from the “Ballarat Courier” of 10 May 1954. “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 Street, hurled fifty yards across Grenville Street, bounded onto a footpath, and crashed through a brick wall into the office of the Buck’s Head Hotel”.

Terry noted the time difference – they remembered the incident happened after 10 pm, but the “Courier” stated the time was about 6.30 pm. The “Courier” stated that Nan “showed great foresight” as she moved from the centre compartment to the rear compartment of the tram, closed the door and sat and waited. A witness was quoted: “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”.

The “Courier” stated that a nine year old boy “escaped death by seconds” when he left the office of the Bucks Head Hotel shortly before the tram crashed through the wall. When it is remembered that the tram had gone down the hill, crossed the road and mounted the footpath without hitting another vehicle or pedestrian, it was a lucky escape for all in the vicinity that evening.

The tram involved in the runaway, No. 24, was so badly damaged that it never ran again. The motorman of No. 24, Frank Callahan, was sacked because he had not set the points uphill towards Lydiard St. The hotel was demolished in 1960.

I thanked Terry and Patricia for telling me their memories of this incident, which will be included in an article for "Fares Please".