



# AUSTRALIAN RAILWAY ENTHUSIAST

\$4.95

Vol. 31, No. 1 MARCH 1993





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Vol. 31, No. 1  
MARCH 1993

JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF RAILWAY ENTHUSIASTS LIMITED

AFFILIATIONS: The Railway Enthusiasts' Society Inc., Auckland New Zealand  
New Zealand Railway and Locomotive Society Inc., Wellington, New Zealand  
The Railway Society of Southern Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa

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FRONT COVER: Running a morning peak service to St Kilda railway station, VR broad gauge drop centre 36 is coming out of Ormond Road in Elwood to cross the MMTB's Point Ormond line along Glenhuntly Road. The difference between the Board's track condition and the VR's is noticeable in this 10 ASA Kodachrome taken during the last years of the Elwood railway trams. June 1957. Jim Seletto photograph

## Editorial Comment

The non-profit Rail Museum in Gympie (160 kilometres north of Brisbane, Qld) is to be congratulated for recently completing its five year restoration of QR C17 No.45. The 4-8-0 has made the transition from a totally stripped derelict to that of a fully restored, operational steam locomotive. Parts were searched for high and low, with several thousand kilometres travelled, and as a result the engine has fittings from no less than 41 other locomotives.

Stories of restoration such as this occur right around the country; were it not for the dedication and determination of preservationists, our railway heritage would only consist of fading photographs and memories. It is a generally thankless undertaking that deserves more recognition than it receives.

I wish to give special thanks to Jim Seletto for allowing the use of his cherished colour slides in this issue.

### Notice to Contributors

Our magazine always welcomes articles and photographs of railway or tramway interest.

Articles should be typed, double spaced on one side of the paper only. If you cannot provide typed articles neat, legible handwritten articles are acceptable. As our photo reproduction is by means of scanning, (as opposed to making half tones) we prefer good quality black and white prints or colour slides. In fact, many of the black and white reproductions you see in the magazine are from colour slides. Colour prints are acceptable if they are well lit and clearly show tonal separation, i.e., flat, muddy prints are not suitable.

High quality, original, vertical colour slides are needed for the front cover and can be left at the RAILFAN SHOP at 40 Market Street, Melbourne, or mailed to the Editor.

All material should be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope to ensure its return.

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Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Association.

# Memories of the Railway Trams

by Jim Seletto

Photography by Blousy Frump\*

*The dour Victorian Railways operated two tramway routes in Melbourne which survived until the invasion of television and cheap motor cars*



**Morning peak Elwood style – VR 'Auntie' 39 shunts at Vautier Street to pick up eager (??) passengers for the run to St Kilda station. 36 makes another short trip to Elwood depot, leaving 30 – behind the camera – to perform the long distance journey to Middle Brighton, in 1957.**

It has been well over 30 years since the last railway tram left St Kilda station and grumbled its way up the Grey Street hill, for on 28 February 1959, car 28, with about 200 people on board made its last run back to Elwood depot, ending 50 years of service to the people of St Kilda, Elwood and Brighton Beach.

And yet, when I look at the photo of No.41 on my wall it seems like only a few weeks ago. Even in the streets along the former tram route there are still reminders, such as twice the number of poles necessary to hold up the telegraph wires . . . the overly large roundabout at Glenhuntly Road which I believe still has the dual gauge crossover, buried beneath its flora . . . Elwood depot still remains fairly complete . . . and on the 'branch line' (Sandringham to Black Rock)

there were, at last sighting, still one or two of the old tramway shelter sheds standing.

What was there about this tram service that endeared itself to the public? Perhaps it was the drop centre cars, Nos 28 to 49. These cars, tall and severe looking, like an elderly Aunt, certainly didn't endear themselves because of their looks, and comfort for tramway passengers was not on ANY tramcar builder's mind in 1917 when they were built.

The uncompromising hardness of the wooden seats made getting up from the seat to alight at your stop a distinct pleasure. Actually getting on or off the cars was made difficult by the narrow doorways. And they were draughty, slow and weary. The tired sigh as the brakes released, the grinding of the motors as they climbed steep Grey Street (only just beating old ladies with walking

sticks), the flexing of the bodies as each saloon twisted in a different direction on the rather awful track-work. They certainly didn't attract passengers, yet everyone loved them.

With their tall, severe, solid appearance even other tramcars respected them. You could almost see the look of respect on the MMTB's sporty looking W2s as they gracefully gave way to the elderly drop centres trundling across Board tracks at Fitzroy Street and Carlisle Street, and down at Glenhuntly Road the dear little Birney stood respectfully aside as Auntie swept by imperiously. Perhaps it was waiting for a pat on the head, or a bag of boiled lollies, but Auntie was a severe, haughty lady and the poor little Birney would sigh and waddle off, unrewarded, every time.

At Head Street it was a different matter. Here Auntie would gather up

\*Elderly lady of no fixed abode, known to J. Seletto.

her strength and sail grandly across, defying the mere motor buses to "just TRY and stop me . . .". Wisely the motor buses gave way to this charging, defiant heap of Victorian tramway architecture. So the old tram (sorry . . . the elderly Aunty tram) swept on down St Kilda Street to Middle Brighton and Brighton Beach terminus, where she would have a chat with the dog-box electric train that was invariably stabled there.

Despite the lack of comfort, speed and warmth, the trams were loved. They were well known as the 'friendly trams', probably because the crews were permanent, ever-courteous and cheerful. There wasn't the staff turnover that the MMTB had so regular passengers got to know not only the tramcars themselves, but also the crews. On a cold winter's night you could step into the relative warmth of the old cars and be sure of getting home dry, if nothing more. They were very reliable, had a good service timetable, and there were the friendly, unhurried crews.

The railway trams (or Aunties) as we children knew them, were well known over a large part of Melbourne, from South Melbourne to Hampton, Elwood to South Caulfield. Unlike the MMTB service where people were wont to give you instructions like "No. You can't get to

there from here, you'll have to go into the city, and get a tram there . . .", with the railway trams you only had to mention WHERE you wanted to go, and people would say "Yes, that's easy, just get the railway tram . . .".

At once there was a wide range of choice venues immediately reachable. The pleasant but rocky beaches of Brighton Beach, Half Moon Bay, Middle Brighton and Elwood; the picture theatres — the *Broadway*, *Victory*, *Palais* and *Memorial*. The *Maison de Danse* and the *Palais de Dance* ballrooms, Luna Park, St Moritz Ice Skating Rink, the Village Belle Hotel, the shopping centres of Elwood and St Kilda; all were readily accessible. Not to mention the naughty parts of St Kilda near the station, and even the playing fields (different kind of playing) at St Kilda Oval and Middle Park were within walking distance.

Access to them was simply by catching the 'beach tram' (the Birney from Elsternwick to Point Ormond), then taking the railway tram in the appropriate direction. All you needed was time and a pocket full of coppers. ("No, no, Minnie! . . . not a pocket full of policemen . . . a pocket full of pennies . . . you silly old modern type woman . . .")

The steel cars, Nos 52 to 54, were put into service in 1941 and were everything that the Aunties were not.

They were sleek, silent, had padded seats, lino on the floor instead of slats, lined ceilings, the ubiquitous railway tail light and wonder of wonders, air-operated sliding doors, to keep out the cold and the wet. Yet people never really took to them. They liked them of course, but the youngsters would always go for the hard, severe-looking drop centres, especially in warm weather.

In later years, when the service was dying, the railways still refused to bow to public demand by putting padded seats in the older cars, and rostered them in cold weather, even when the steel cars might have been more suitable. So, you rode in the spartan dog-box cars from Flinders Street, changing into the even more spartan drop centres at St Kilda station. The railways remained uncompromising to the very end.

The MMTB people, however, cared for their passengers a little better, and in the cold, wet weather they took the little Birney back to a nice warm corner of Glenhuntly depot, put its little feet in nice warm slippers, and gave it a copy of the *Tim the Toyman* catalogue to look at. Then they brought out the formidable T178 to take over the service.

Now, T178 was a modified T class single-truck car; almost as big and severe as the drop centres. It had the same Victorian solid, no-nonsense



Steel car 53 outside Elwood depot on the last evening of tramway operation. Two of the three sheds are still standing today, in use as the PTC Elwood bus depot. The line opened in 1906: the depot buildings date back to 1907 and replaced the original structure which was totally destroyed by fire — the fleet of 17 trams was reduced to charred wrecks. With typical Edwardian fervour the Railway Department purchased seven tramcar bodies from Sydney, placed them on the fire damaged trucks and had the service reopened in 10 days!

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VICTORIAN RAILWAYS.

Date.....

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ADULT AND FIVE CHILDREN.

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EAST RICHMOND**  
TO  
**BLACK ROCK**  
(Change train at Richmond)

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H. J. Green, Government Printer.

ELWOOD ISSUE **045**  
VICTORIAN RAILWAYS. NOT TRANSFERABLE  
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MALE—SECOND CLASS. FARE  
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DICKENS STREET and MELBOURNE  
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(For Conditions See Back)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

TICKETS COURTESY W. UREN

BELOW: from the VR Suburban Working Timetable of November 1943.

COURTESY JAMES GORDON

**MELBOURNE TO ST. KILDA (ELECTRIC TRAIN), ST. KILDA TO BRIGHTON BEACH (ELECTRIC TRAM).**

Miles.	STATIONS.	Week Days (Saturdays Excepted).													
		1	2	3	3a	4	5a	6	6a	7	8	9	9a	10	11
16	(ELECTRIC TRAIN.)														
17	FLINDERS-STREET dep.														
17	South Melbourne														
23	Albert Park														
12	Middle Park														
21	ST. KILDA ..														
28	ST. KILDA ..														
	(ELECTRIC TRAM.)														
1	ST. KILDA ..														
1	Dickens-street														
21	Elwood Depot														
31	Park-street														
61	BRIGHTON BEACH														

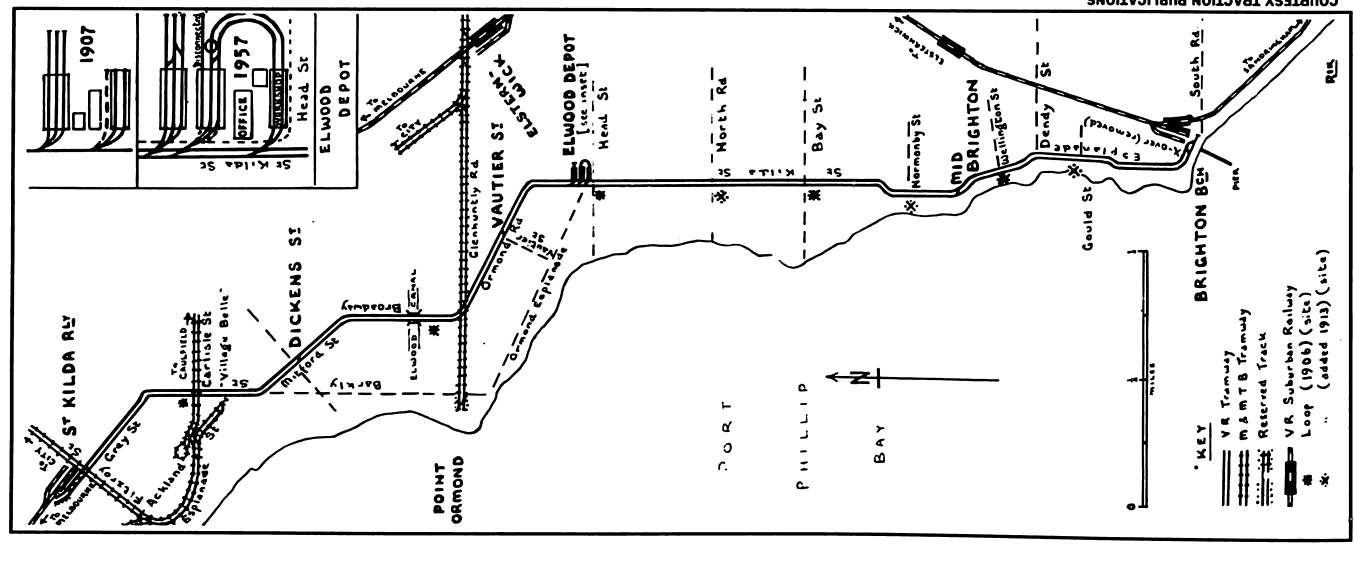
**Down.**

From 8.6 a.m. trains run from Flinders-street to St. Kilda (stopping all stations) as under. The over-all time between Flinders-street and St. Kilda is 9 minutes, and trains depart Flinders-street at—

a.m.	p.m.
8, 0, 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54	1, 4, 12, 20, 28, 36, 44, 52
9, 0, 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 43, 50	2, 0, 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56
10, 0, 6, 12, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56	3, 4, 12, 20, 28, 36, 44, 52
11, 4, 12, 20, 28, 36, 44, 53	4, 0, 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56
12, 0, 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56	5, 0, 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54
	6, 0, 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 56

**Up.**

a.m.	p.m.
7, 2, 12, 20, 28, 36, 44, 52	FLINDERS-ST. dep. 11, 48, 12, 0
8, 0, 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56	South Melbourne " 11, 51, 12, 3
9, 4, 12, 20, 28, 36, 44, 52	Albert Park " 11, 53, 12, 6
10, 0, 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56	Middle Park " 11, 55, 12, 7
11, 4, 12, 20, 28, 36, then as shown	ST. KILDA arr. 11, 57, 12, 9





The Black Rock tramway which commenced in 1919 ran a further 2¼ miles to Beaumaris from 1926 to 1931. The single line extension wandered along unmade streets through the beachside sand dunes, serving at that time a sparsely settled area. The tea trees and dunes have ironically given way to development, becoming one of Melbourne's most exclusive suburbs. At the Black Rock terminus in Bluff Road, 49 is arriving from Sandringham. June 1956.

appearance that the Aunties had. But it had been modified for use by The Prince of Wales, in Melbourne's [Victoria's] centenary in 1934 — it had lined ceilings, public address system, lino on the floor, luxuriously padded seats and quite a good turn of speed, being capable of 40 mph, and it had air-operated doors and steps. It was a good foil for the railway trams, each looking severe, each tall and dignified, each representing the long-gone era when trams were king of the road.

### The Branch Line

The short standard gauge line from Sandringham to Black Rock was always regarded by the Elwood staff as 'the branch line' and was even viewed differently by the local passengers, who referred to it as the 'Black Rock trams', rather than the 'railway trams' and it had a small collection of three standard drop centres, Nos 47 to 49, with an occasional visit from No.43 from Elwood.

Also, it had two drop centre cars, converted to one man operation, Nos 50 and 51. These were reputedly the longest tramcars in Australia, made so by extending the ends and fitting front and centre entrances with air-operated doors and retractable steps. The interiors were just as severe as the Elwood Aunties. When Sandring-

ham closed, they were taken to Elwood, but union bans prevented them from entering service there, which from a tramcar connoisseur's viewpoint was a great pity.

The service at Sandringham was much less hectic than Elwood, and two cars were easily able to meet demands in the off peak, with four in peak hours. Housed in Sandringham depot were two single truckers, substantial looking toast racks, Nos 23 and 26 but I never saw them in service.

Like the Elwood cars, the locals loved their Aunties, but with much less intensity as they tended to be elderly persons.

\* \* \*

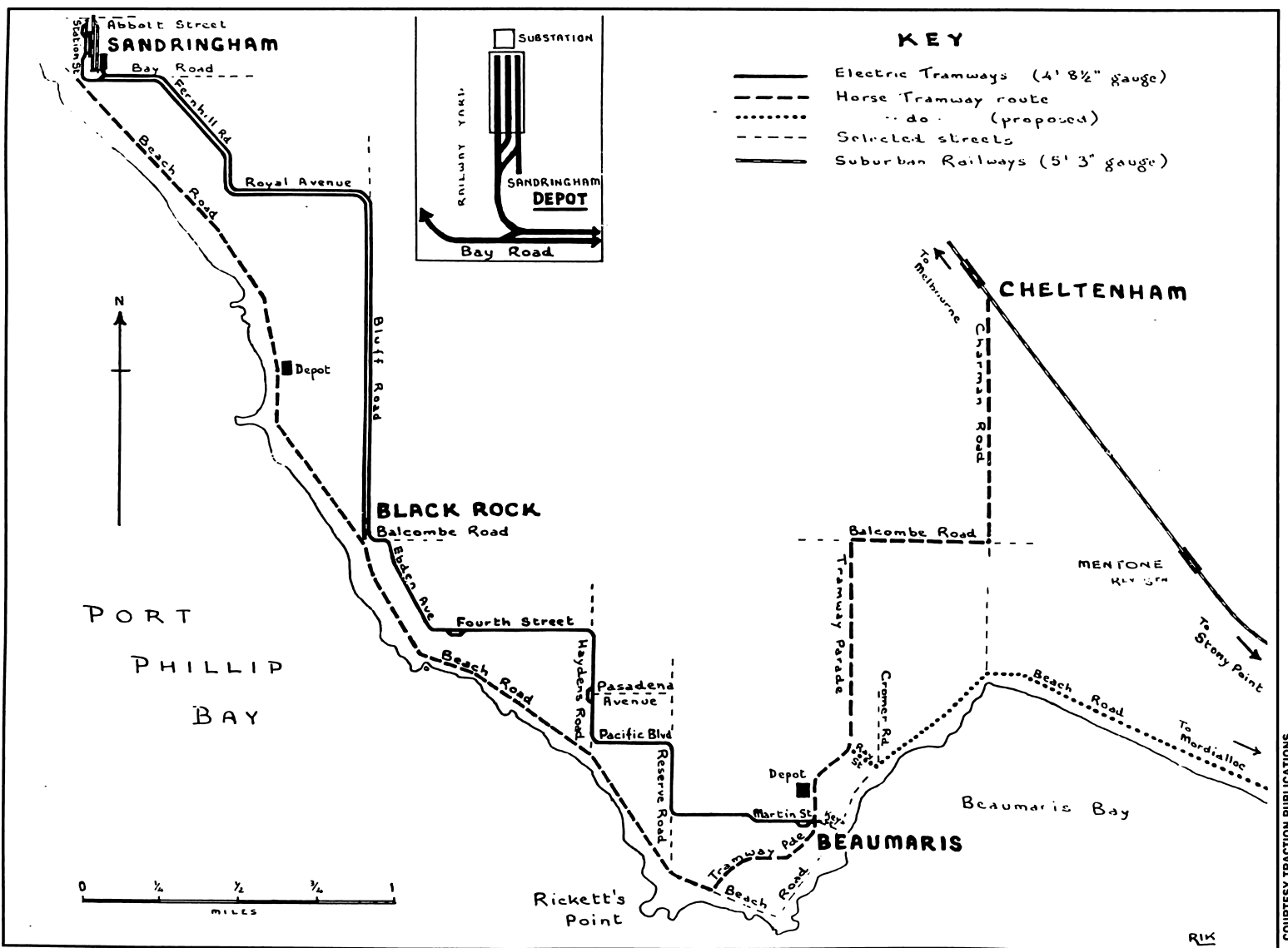
So, what happened that caused these loved trams to be scrapped? It was a combination of many things . . . firstly, after the extremely heavy traffic during the war years, when it was said that the trams were carrying over 6,000,000 passengers per year (according to Leon Marshall-Wood's book *The Brighton Electric Line*), this heavy traffic plus the shortage of men and materials caused maintenance of the track to suffer. The position was that at the end of the war the track was in such a bad state that nothing short of total reconstruction would have sufficed.

But, as with the railways themselves, money was not forthcoming

from the Government. Mr. G. F. Brown [the final VR Chairman of Commissioners] in a speech at his retirement said that all of the railways' income (and it was considerable) was paid into the State coffers and then the railways had to go and beg for their own money to run the service and buy new rolling stock. But the State government was very miserly in handing out funds, so maintenance over all the network was very much delayed. With the main system strapped for cash, the tramway services were placed low on the list for upgrading, despite the very good passenger numbers due to petrol rationing.

Then came the end of rationing, along with the first flood of Holden and Ford cars, and hire-purchase. All at once the working man found that he could afford a car (if the entire family was working) and in his shiny new automobile he didn't have to spend his annual week's leave at Black Rock. In his new chariot he could venture forth to far-off Rosebud, and nearly halfway back.

The entire transport system suddenly found a huge drop in passenger numbers. The VR, unlike the MMTB, refused to improve the comfort of the old drop centres so trams began to run empty for the first time. But worse was to come, in the mid 1950s, with the introduction of television.



People now deserted the pleasure spots like the movies, the dance halls, the roller and ice skating rinks, Luna Park, the squash courts and the local beaches. To give you an idea of how serious this was, at one area alone the number of people was around 8,000. The huge *Palais* held 3000, the *Victory 2000*, the *Memorial 1000*, Luna Park 1000 and St Moritz 500, most of whom came by tram.

Within six months of the first television station opening the numbers came down to about 200 each. This was disastrous not only for the trams, but many picture theatres gave up the ghost immediately, further reducing the evening passenger traffic. By the end of 1956 the trams ran empty most of the time, with full loading only in the peak hours.

The railways suggested that the MMTB might 'like' to take over the Elwood line. The MMTB, after they had stopped laughing hysterically, counter proposed that the VR might 'like' to take over the Point Ormond line. It was decided, after the Commissioners had stopped rolling around on the carpet, laughing up-

roariously, that the system would be shut down. The Sandringham line being in worst repair, and standard gauge, and with almost no traffic, was in its entirety closed first, on 5 November 1956.

The Brighton Beach section was closed to Middle Brighton in January 1957, then six months later was cut back to Elwood Depot. Finally the end came on 28 February 1959. By this time, due to lack of maintenance the track was becoming dangerous to trams and motor traffic alike, with the rails sunken deep into the asphalt in many places, and the sleepers protruding in many others. The cars, while definitely showing signs of old age, were kept neat and clean right to the end.

\* \* \*

Finally a little story about the power supply, told to me by a driver. It was designed originally to run a generator by steam power. This would supply electricity for the cars in the off peak loading, and during the night a huge bank of storage batteries was charged up, to provide additional current in the peak hours.

The supply was set at 500 volts pressure, as against the MMTB supply of 600 volts.

Well, during the war years the engineer at the Elwood power house noticed that the trams were becoming more efficient; they were not using as much of the battery supply as they had for 40 years. Puzzled, but pleased, the engineer sipped his cup of tea and proceeded to read his *Smiths Weekly*.

Meanwhile, the MMTB Birney driver was finding it more and more difficult to see where he was going, particularly at peak time. Eventually the Board sent one of their junior engineers down to Point Ormond, to check track bonding. Everything appeared normal, with the VR cars dashing past unusually spritely, while the little Birney sagged. Strange, thought the engineer, but then the Birney was getting old and so he rode his bike back to Glenhuntly to have a ponder.

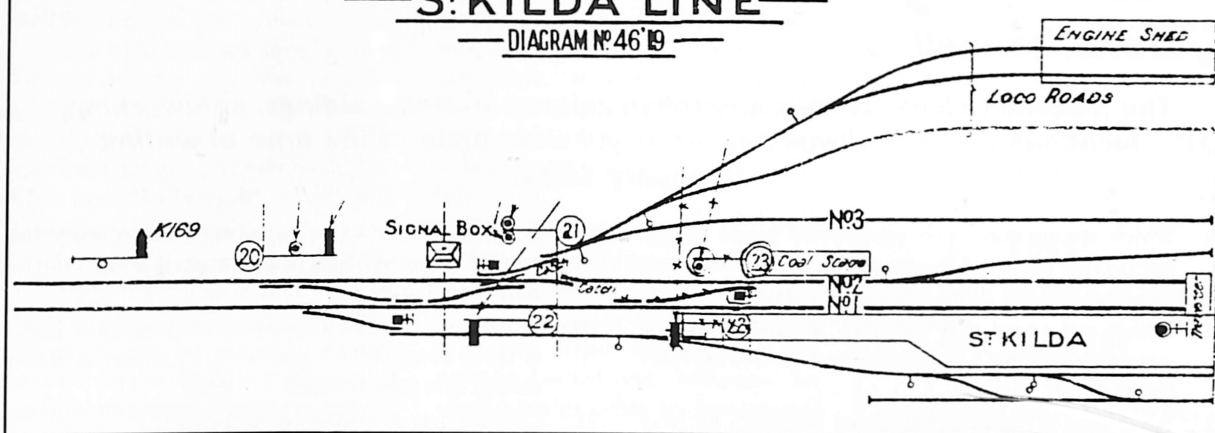
Then one night six months later, the main generator stopped working at Elwood. But while the generator

# VICTORIAN RAILWAYS

## — ST KILDA LINE —

DIAGRAM NO 46 '19

COURTESY PETER STONEHAM



Being broad gauge, the Brighton Beach VR tram route was physically connected to the St Kilda railway, until 1941. This extract from a 1919 St Kilda line signalling diagram shows the connection and the tram tracks outside the station (at bottom) and other items of interest such as the locomotive traverser at the platform's dead end, the engine shed and the coal stage. The electric train service had not yet commenced.

was stopped, the power engineer found to his amazement the trams were still running, albeit very, very slowly! Now, the batteries were disconnected for safety reasons — where was the power coming from, he mused. The Birney driver might have given him a clue, for poor little 217 was barely moving at the Point Ormond end, while she came back to life at the Elsternwick end of the line, where the overhead energy came direct from the main supply.

Yup! You've guessed it, the insulator had broken down at the Broadway end of the VR supply, and the system was running on bled-off

supply from the MMTB. I'm not sure if the Board ever found out, but the VR hurriedly repaired the insulator, and things looked much brighter on the Birney once more.

\* \* \*

That's about all. There were the usual protest meetings when it was proposed to close down the trams, mostly attended by people from other suburbs, travelling by car. But, even with the system in good condition, with new cars from the MMTB, I doubt if the people at the well-heeled end of the track at Brighton Beach would have given up riding in their Bentleys to use the

trams to the city, and at the St Kilda end of the line, the big pleasure spots of the 1930s are only ghosts of their former glory, if indeed they exist at all today.

Still, from time to time, suggestions come to light to extend the tram line from St Kilda along the old VR route. Perhaps they would survive. Better brains than mine might see ways of making the section to Elwood viable, but I doubt if I will ever have the pleasure of riding the Birney and catching the big old Aunty car to St Kilda. Why would I want to go there, I can be mugged in my own suburb . . .



X<sup>2</sup> 675, Point Ormond, three nights from the closure of the VR line. The full 600 volts having been restored, cars need TWO trolley poles to handle the voltage. 25.2.59.





JIM SELETTO