

GEELONG'S TRAMWAYS

By John. M. Moore

The Melbourne Electric Supply Company began production and distribution of electricity in Geelong on May 3, 1901. Later in the same year street lighting was successfully introduced to replace the gas lighting which had been in operation since 1861. Public interest was so stimulated that by 1904 approaches where being made to the company regarding the possibility of introducing an electric tramway system.

The company was not happy at the prospect of setting up a system of electric traction for a population of approximately 25,000 people when advice from England and the Continent advocated that a minimum population of 50,000 was required to ensure the financial success of a tramway undertaking. At this time the people of Geelong were being transported from the city to the suburbs in double decker horse-drawn buses. In the winter time these vehicles, due to the very muddy conditions, were strewn with fresh smelling straw each day for the passengers' comfort. The majority of these vehicles at the turn of the century were operated by Cobb and Co., which is remembered for its famous coach services to the goldfields of Ballarat and Bendigo. Many stirring stories are recorded in the history of Victoria of their early conquests of the rough bush tracks, overcoming the obstacles of bushfires, floods, landslides and bushrangers.

Mr. Alexander Dawson, one of the principals of the original company, resigned as resident engineer and was succeeded on March 19, 1904, by Mr. G. G. Jobbins. Mr. Jobbins soon established himself as one of Geelong's leading citizens, and was elected to the council of the Geelong Chamber of Commerce in 1905. The quality of his 23 years' management of the Geelong Electricity supply and tramways throughout practically the whole period of its pioneering and development days, is to be measured by the high standard and excellent shape of these undertakings when they eventually came under the control of the State Electricity Commission in 1930. Mr. Jobbins capped off a brilliant career by eventually becoming the Engineer and Manager of Electricity Supply Department, Melbourne, and finally Chairman of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria.

In 1907 the company became party to a preliminary agreement with the Geelong municipalities, Town of Geelong, Boroughs of Newtown and Chilwell, Geelong West and the Shire of South Barwon. This was signed on January 27, 1907. Application was then made to the Government under regulations provided under "Construction of Tramways Amendment Act, 1883, Act 47 Victoria No. 786 Section 51, and of the Tramways Act,

1890". As this particular Act had been designed to suit the special requirements of the Melbourne cable trams, it took several months for the necessary alterations of the engineering features to be suitably amended and included.

On May 29, 1907, Messrs. Harwood and Pincott, Solicitors for the Council, had drawn up an agreement which provided for a £200 deposit of good faith with a further guarantee of £300 that work on the new tramway system would be commenced by the M.E.S. Company and run uninterrupted so that within a period of 2½ years, the trams would commence running to the satisfaction of the councils concerned. The period of franchise granted was 30 years.

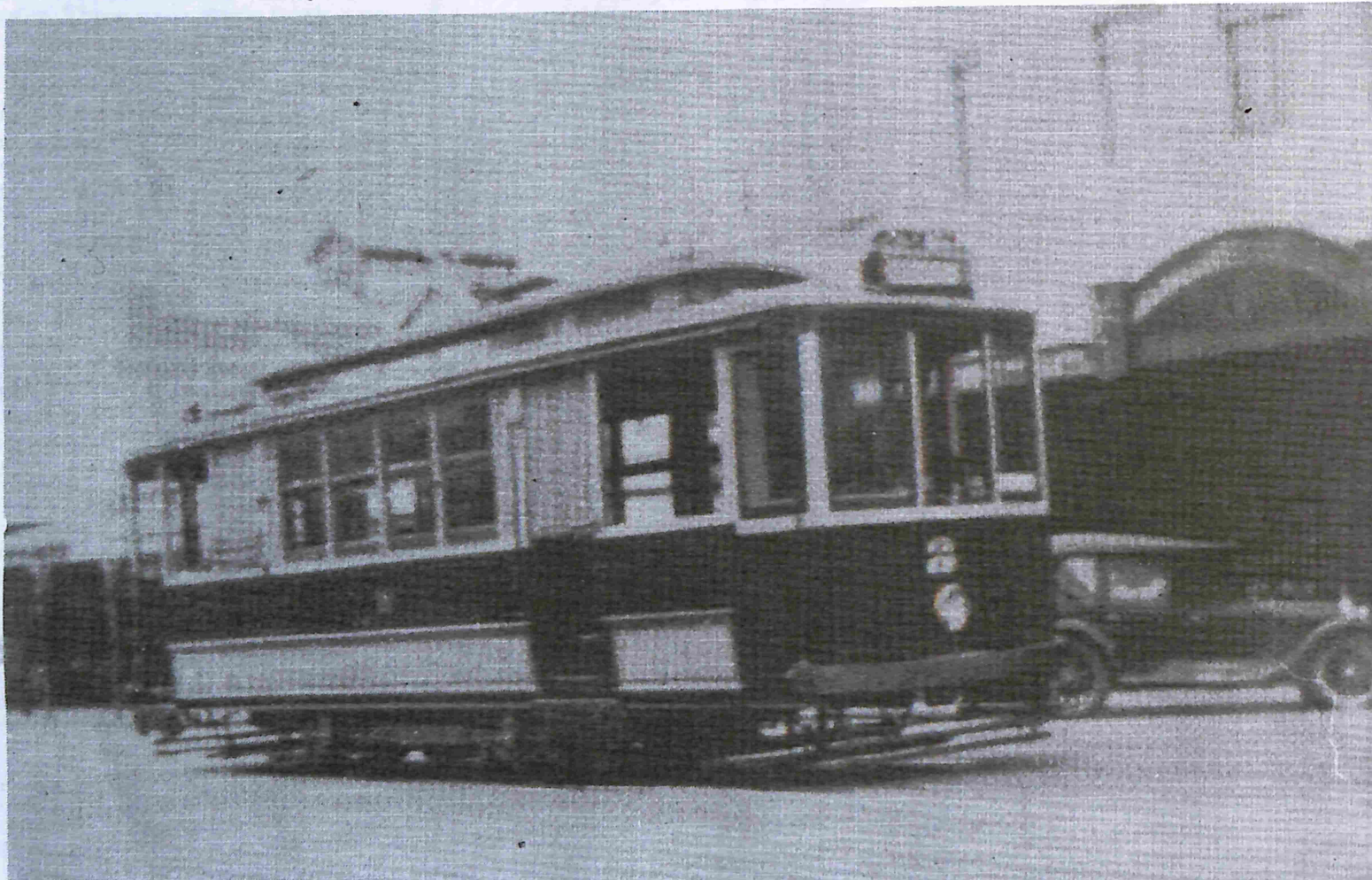
This original document was signed by the Mayor of Geelong, T. E. Bostock; Mayor of Newtown and Chilwell, H. Blomfield-Brown; Mayor of Geelong West, Robert W. Dalton; and the President of the South Barwon Shire, A. G. White, with their respective Town Clerks.

The local newspapers featured the contents of the agreement on June 15, 1907, a summary of the most important clauses being:

Cars would proceed between West Geelong or Newtown to the station or wharf to deal with Rail or Boat traffic.

Geelong No. 3 trundles through the City in its pre-war colour scheme.

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utes from 7.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m. and a minimum service of 15 minutes would be maintained during the busiest part of the day, thus giving from Station or Wharf a 5 min. headway or 12 cars per hour, in addition to the pioneer service which could be run by buses on East Geelong.

Through fare 3d. with transfers, two penny, and penny half-penny sections. Children half fare, with at least one working man's car to run before 7.30 a.m., a threepenny ticket entitling bearer to a return journey over the same route at any time during the day. The tram routes shall be brilliantly lit by arc lamps similar to Melbourne tramways.

The tram rails will be laid on concrete sleepers at Bendigo and Ballarat. The road surface between the rails and for 18 inches each side to be maintained by the company.

Subsequently the principal agreement was signed on July 27, 1908, with amendments and variations on July 27, 1909, May 25, 1910, and March 6, 1910.

The newspapers started a controversy fed by a certain section of the public which advocated petrol buses, and offers soon came from individuals who were prepared to operate them. This controversy reached a climax in 1909 when the case was completely referred to the community by the M.E.S. Company commissioned Messrs. Henwood and Dancey, printers, to publish a 29-page brochure containing the facts motor buses versus the electric tramways in which the company (which by this time had all preparations made to introduce a tramway system) declared itself in favour of the electric trams.

Work on the tracks commenced in 1911 and orders for seven trams given to Messrs. Duncan and Fraser, South Australia. These were single truck type, Duncan and Fraser body on Brush trucks with Metro-Vickers electrical system. They arrived in Geelong by train in packages and were assembled at the Geelong depot; they were numbered from 1 to 7. Four trailers for these cars were purchased at the same time and numbered 1 to 4, these were attached to the trams at peak loading time and doubled the capacity of the loading.

The depot was laid out to accommodate these vehicles and tracks No. 1 and No. 2 were made, the trams being assembled on the west side against the brick wall of Blakiston's garage, which was at that time Walker's horse stables. Walker up to that time ran the service with horse drawn carriages to Newtown.

Mr. Tilbury H. Thomas, who had tramway experience in Durban, South Africa, and was engaged with the North Melbourne Electric Light and Tramway Trust as Superintendent, transferred to Geelong in June, 1911, as Tramways Superintendent. He prepared the first order for the West and Newtown services to run to Station or Wharf as required and also for the East bus service, which was run with Milnes-Daimler petrol buses, some of which had been imported direct from Germany. Mr. Thomas continued

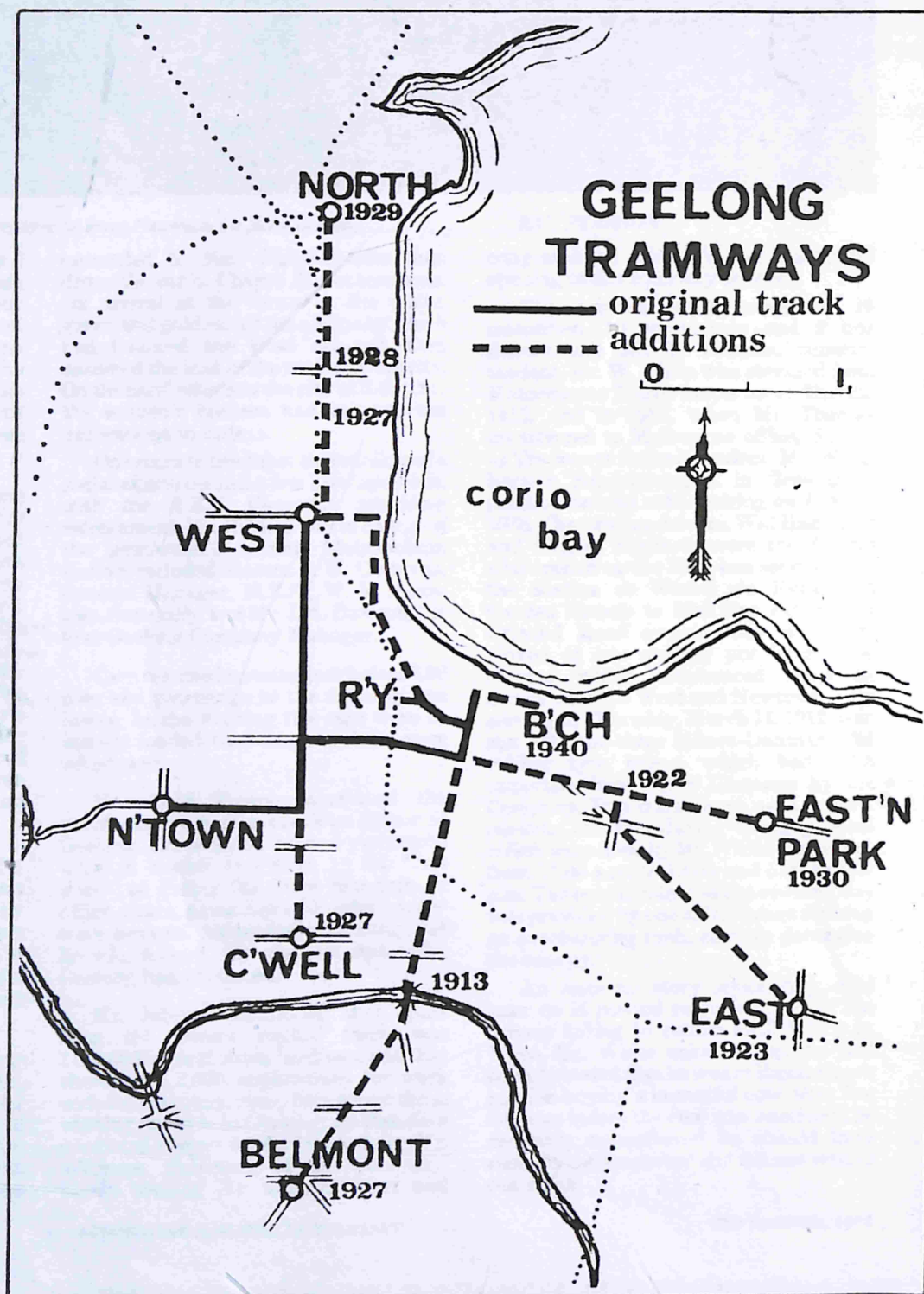
in charge of tramways operations when the Commission took over the branch in 1930. He was transferred to Melbourne in 1936 as Tramway Superintendent of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo Tramways, and on retirement in 1950 his association with tramways had covered a period of 48 years. On retirement as Tramway Superintendent, he was succeeded by Mr. Mawby, who had previously been D.T.S. at Ballarat.

The cars were assembled and the trucks completed by January, 1912, and after trials had been made, all preparations were finalised to commence services. The tracks had been laid with 90lb. British standard grooved rail on concrete foundations. The overhead supply was provided at 550 V.D.C. through 3/0 S.W.G. grooved copper trolley wire which was supported by steel centre poles in the heart of the city, and by wooden span poles over the remaining part of the system. Track telephones provided a direct link to the depot and a £5

necessary to operate them. A Baker electric lorry was purchased, which was operated by large batteries and used by the supervisors for many years on supervision and repair work. The chassis of this old vehicle was made into a trailer, still being used by the Distribution department, carrying oil for the transformer refills.

For the official opening on 14th March, 1912, Geelong declared a gala day, shops liberated their staff, school children received a half holiday and the crowd which thronged the city was enormous (Geelong's population was about 25,000 at that time).

The four cars which made the circuit of the routes were gaily decorated by the respective official women's organisations from each Council. The Geelong city car carried the coat of arms and latticed streamers along the side; all ornamentation was made in artificial paper flowers. Newtown and Chilwell had



etermine where the best loading lay, and at one time ran along Malop Street. They continued in service until replaced by electric traction in 1922. The buses were very unpopular with the non-passenger public. The solid rubber tyres cut into the road surfaces, which were not sealed in those days; with noisy exhausts and accompanied by a pall of dust, they frightened every horse in the district. The eastern suburb was only sparsely settled in those days.

When the buses were dismantled the bodies fell to pieces and the chassis were sold to Blakiston and Company for trailers. The buses were housed where the coal yard elevators later were, and were filled twice a day when in service, a total of 104 miles daily being run and using 28 gallons of "Pratts" benzine, which came in 4 gallon tins requiring a store to be kept in hand; each tin was test weighed at 3lbs. Any deficiencies were claimed for.

After opposition from the Victorian railways had been overcome, work commenced early in 1913 on the tracks along Moorabool Street to the north side of Barwon Bridge, engineering difficulties of crossing the railway tracks at Carr street being finally overcome by the company paying the Railways Department £15,000 towards the viaduct and embankment for the railway crossing.

At this stage a further six conductors, five motormen and one motor bus relief driver were employed ready for the opening of the service on December 11, 1913. A lot of track material had been on hand for this work, having been ordered in anticipation of further development.

in April, 1913, having had previous experience with the North Melbourne Electric Light and Tramway Trust; he graduated to Depot Foreman in 1915 and served in that capacity until retirement in 1953.

As the loading developed on the existing routes three more Duncan and Fraser cars similar to the first batch arrived and were assembled in the depot, being numbered 8, 9 and 10. Work commenced on trailers numbered 1 and 4 to convert them into open type (toast rack) cars; these when finished, were numbered 11 and 12. Two additional track roads, Nos. 3 and 4, were made in the depot to accommodate the increasing fleet, now a total of 12 trams, 2 trailers and 3 buses.

An amusing incident occurred during the conversion of No. 4 trailer into a tram — one of the 6" x 4" running bearers had to be sawn half through. The carpenter did not know that a motorman, one Jack Pender, had got underneath the vehicle and, grasping the saw with a pair of pliers, retarded the operator, who soon knocked up, declaring it the toughest wood he had ever encountered. Several others tried with their own saws until finally Pender was located on his hands and knees; this was unfortunate for him as he provided an excellent target for a well placed kick.

This man provided many original and amusing incidents. He was an excellent sport, playing competition cricket until he retired. He became a Traffic Inspector January 1, 1929, and on the retirement of Senior Inspector S. Ball on January 1, 1941, assumed that office until he retired on July 23, 1952. He was then succeeded

L. J. A. Heame.

A trailer body was bought for £20 from the North Melbourne Company and was converted in Geelong into a cleaner car. The truck was made from trailer No. 11 converted for this purpose; this vehicle remained in service until March 26, 1956. In 1923, the converted bodies of 11 and 12 toast rack type were scrapped, Blakistons buying them for trailer units.

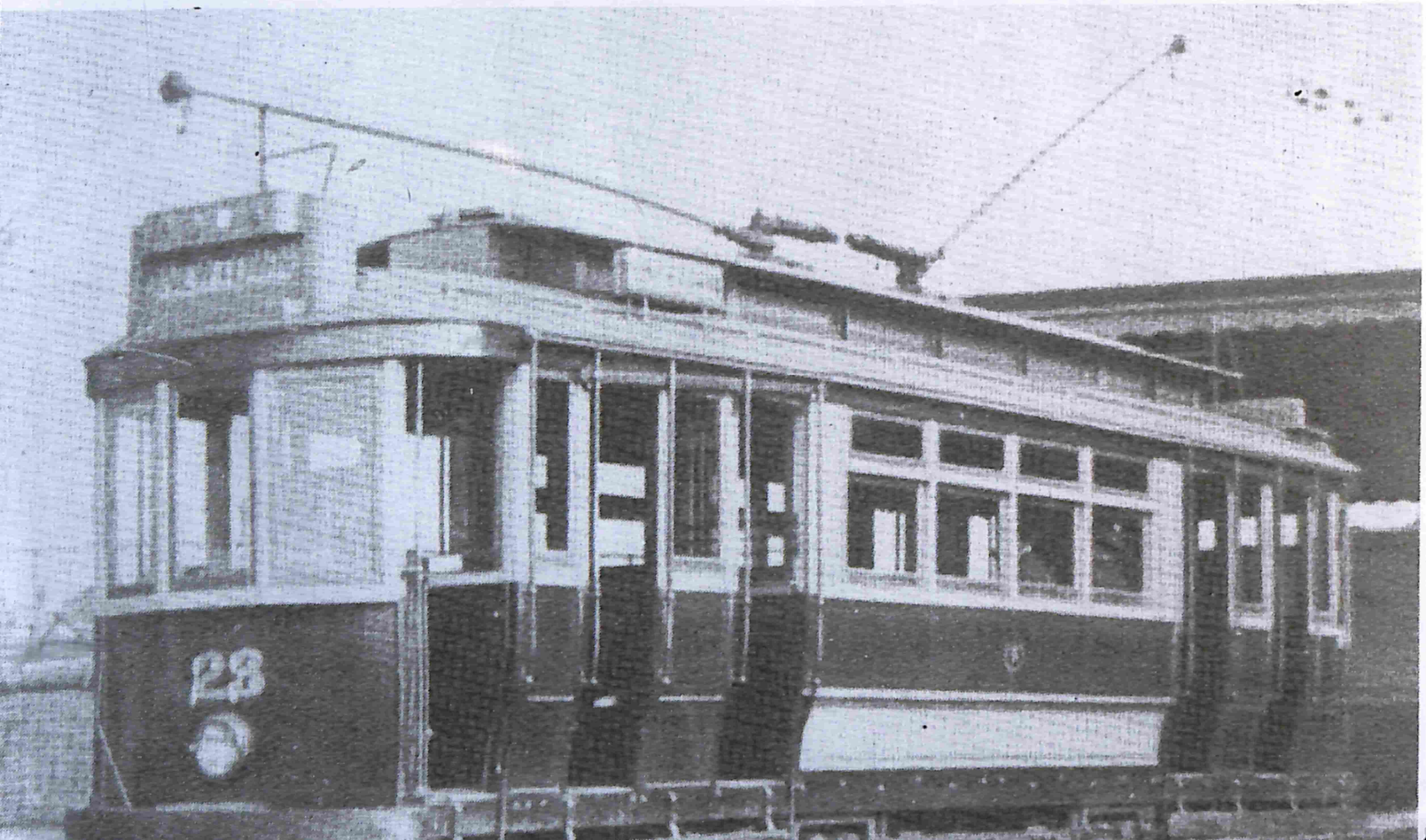
Two Birney safety cars were imported from America with Model 795 Brill Trucks. These cars incorporated the "dead man control", safety doors and electric braking. They came in large packing cases on which the company paid a total of £3000 duty, and were assembled in the depot, body work by Mr. Joe Wilks, foreman carpenter, and carpenter Tom Miller, the truck sections by Mr. V. Phipps, Depot Foreman.

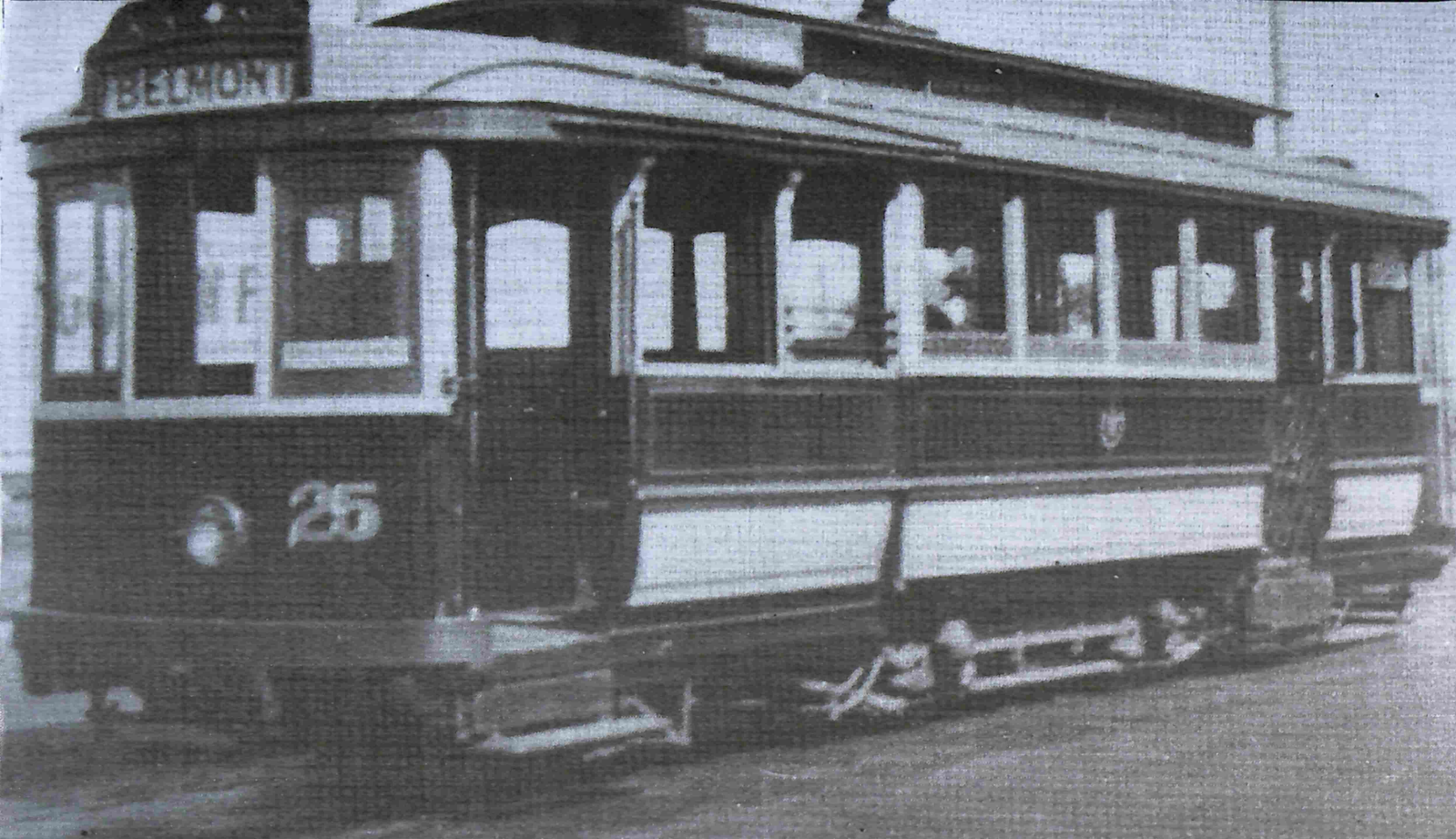
In 1925, eight Pengelley cars numbered from 16 to 23 were purchased new in Adelaide. They comprised J. G. Brill E.B.I. Radiax trucks, Metro Vickers Electric Equipment, 55 h.p. motors, the wheels and axles being made by Thompson's Engineering Works, Castle-maine.

On October 12, 1922, the Milnes-Daimler bus service was replaced with tram cars, running along Ryrie Street from the corner of Moorabool to Garden Street. Work on tracks continued until February 3, 1923, when the service was extended to the Ormond Road and Boundary Road corner. The population of Geelong had increased to 36,500 by this time. With the arrival of the Pengelley cars, the converted trailer cars were scrapped and the chassis sold to Blakistons for conversion to trailers.

The big Pengelley's were unusual in having Radiax trucks and two trolley poles — rare on a single truck tram. Here No. 23 waits at the station for yet another A2 hauled passenger train to connect.

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Geelong No. 25 was an ex P & M.T.T. combination car. It was later renumbered 28 after two serious accidents.
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The extension along Pakington Street from Aphrasia Street to Fyans and Pakington Streets corner, 0.6 miles, was completed and opened on September 30, 1927. The route was called Chilwell but it actually ran in common with the Newtown route for 1.0 mile. Service cars usually passed on the Retreat Road loop. This loop was installed when the Newtown tram route was changed from Retreat Road and Pleasant Street to Aphrasia Street when the Council bought a vacant block of land on the south side of the Town Hall to allow Aphrasia Street to connect directly with Pakington Street.

The Chilwell route was through-routed to East Geelong with a 15-minute headway; this position was changed in March, 1952, when, with the introduction of modern rosters, it became an individual route serving alternately or to the best advantage, the Station or Eastern Beach.

Tracks were completed as far as Bell Parade, a distance of 1.82 miles, and the route opened for service on July 6, 1927. An extension along Melbourne Road to Victoria Street, 0.18 mile, was completed and operated from June 14, 1928. A further extension to Separation Street was completed on December 20, 1929. During the war years different bodies sought to force an extension to the northern industries, but technical difficulties of bridging the railway tracks, and the rapidly deteriorating overall condition of the tramway equipment, were sufficient to justify this step.

North and Belmont routes were through-routed on the introduction of the north service and remained so until the services were terminated in March, 1956. Due to the unequal mileage, Belmont — 11 miles, North — 2.81, efficient

rostering was difficult. 20 minutes running time was given to each route, which was 5 minutes in excess of that required by the Belmont side. This resulted in the crews sitting for 5 minutes at the terminus and again at the City. This was corrected in March, 1952. The population had now reached 45,250 and approximately 3¼ million passengers were being carried yearly.

Opened on September 18, 1930, the Eastern Park route was purely an extension of 0.486 mile along Ryrie Street from the Garden Street turn-off of the East route. It was put down with rails and other material secured from the tracks to the wharf when they were lifted. Eastern Beach was the last extension made and was in operation by October 19, 1940. This was an extension along Corio Terrace 0.17 mile to assist beach traffic to the newly developed Eastern swimming beach.

In 1930, the city Council By-laws and Regulations were amended to comply with the 1928 Motor Omnibus Act and came into force in Geelong in June, 1931. Buses then operated on prescribed routes, to which the Commission's approval was necessary. Due to the rapid development shown in Geelong, applications for new and altered routes were frequent; this resulted in the old policy of no competition within 880 yards of the tram tracks to be generally reduced to a quarter of a mile, which was to be regarded as the tramway sphere of influence. This had the effect of a gradual encroachment by the bus operators on to previous tramway territory, despite frequent approaches to the Council to better police the by-law regarding the non picking up of passengers at the tram tracks on "in" trips, and similarly the non

setting down of passengers on the "out" trips. The operators continued this practice, causing heavy losses in tramway passengers.

Belmont route was equipped with track telephones in 1930-31 and the track was converted from concrete stringer to sleeper packed rail with agricultural under drains. 2,400 feet of overhead wire placed along the track defeated the severe electrolysis of the telephone cables. Kerley Street depot yard was completed and occupied in 1931. No. 3 Feeder was installed to boost the voltage and to be able to isolate sections. There were 34 motormen and 35 conductors, staff 9, substaff 5, depot employees 8, track and permanent way 9, and overhead 1; total tramway staff — 101.

In 1935, Mr. V. Phipps, depot foreman, was sent to Adelaide to inspect and report on the condition of 4 Birney safety cars 301 to 304. These four trams had been purchased by the Adelaide Tramway Trust at the same time as the M.E.S. imported the two to Geelong. They were purchased and numbered 27, 28, 29 and 30 and gave service until they were despatched to Bendigo when bogie cars were purchased from the M.M.T.B. Four Meadow Bank cars No. 27, 28, 29 and 30 had been despatched to Ballarat in 1935.

By 1940, with the general increase in passengers due to industry swinging into a war effort, plus petrol restrictions, a much heavier than usual loading was forced on to the tramways. The population had increased to 50,500 and the normal 3,500,000 passengers increased the first year of the war by 1,000,000 and from 1942 to 1948 a steady 6,500,000 passengers were carried yearly, the population having increased to 56,000. This

errine loading, coupled with lack of materials, deferred maintenance and shortage of manpower wrote finish to the Geelong tramways services.

To cope with the loading which continued during the post-war years, ten maximum traction trams were purchased secondhand from the M.M.T.B. They arrived spasmodically and were numbered 31, 32, 33 and 34, arriving between January and December 1947; 35, 36 in 1948; 37, 38, 39 and 40 in 1951. They were Duncan and Fraser with Brill trucks and had seen service with the Board since 1914-15. No. 39 was converted for one man operation in 1953. The Union declared they would not operate it as such and as the necessity did not arise, it was not used for one man operation in Geelong.

In 1947 the American Birney Safety Cars Nos. 14, 15, 26, 27, 28 and 29 were sent to Bendigo, where some of the older cars were scrapped. In 1948 traffic experts found that, rather than renew and replan the whole of the tramway system, it would be better to operate a modern bus service. Looking at this decision in 1956 and considering a population of 85,000, just double the population of 1930, one cannot but wonder how the tramways bore the brunt of this period, particularly the post-war years. This indeed must speak volumes for the maintenance staff under Mr. F. Ponting, Works Superintendent.

At the conclusion of the services, all the trams were disposed of: Nos. 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36 maximum traction cars were sent to Bendigo by road, while 37, 39 and 40 were transported to Ballarat. Other cars were sold by tender after the trucks and other equipment had been salvaged for sale or disposal to the other branches.

Mr. W. McKinnon, who had joined the service in 1915 as a conductor and became maintenance foreman in 1924 at £6/5/0 per week, was made Senior Traffic Inspector in 1936 and he replaced Mr. W. White as Branch Tramways Superintendent in 1938. He retired on June 21, 1952. Mr. McKinnon was replaced by Mr. J. M. Moore, who had 14 years' experience with the M.M.T.B. On the completion of the takeover by the bus operators of the tramway routes on March 26, 1956, Mr. Moore transferred to private enterprise in Brisbane, Queensland.

Other staff appointments were: Mr. L. J. A. Hearne joined the service 1924, became Inspector in 1938, and was appointed Senior Inspector on August 28, 1952 in place of Mr. J. Pender. Mr. Hearne, on the closing of tramways, transferred to the "B" Power Station, North Geelong, as a clerk. Mr. R. E.

Fisher, who joined the service in 1927 (war service 1942-45), replaced Mr. E. Jenkins as Inspector in 1947 and on the closing of tramways was transferred to the Stores department. Mr. K. Atkins joined the service as assistant conductor at the age of 18 years, became motorman in 1927, relief inspector in 1947 and was appointed Inspector on February 1, 1951. He was transferred to office staff. Mr. J. McNeil, who joined in 1921 (relief inspector 1940, Inspector 1946), transferred to office staff. Mr. L. Smith joined March 26, 1933 (2 years war service in 1942), and replaced Mr. Hearne as Inspector November 3, 1952, also transferred to office staff.

All tramway staff with 20 years and over of service were retained within the Branch and assistance to secure outside employment was given to others who had not secured a position; this had the happy effect of all personnel being able to secure employment without loss of time.

The take-over of the routes began on January 9, when Trans-Otway buses commenced on the East and West routes, and Benders buses on the Chilwell route. This was achieved quietly and without any public statements other than the praise for the new service. On January 23, Eastern park was taken over by Trans-Otway, and the Newtown route by Benders Busways, with a similar result. On March 5, when the North route was taken over by Benders Busways, the public gave No. 6 — the last tram to run on North route on Sunday night, March 4 — quite a rousing farewell, with motor cars following the tram to the terminus, blowing horns, etc. A party of students from the Teachers' Training College, who rode out on the last trip, certainly livened things up.

The remaining route, Belmont, was taken over by Corio Bus Lines on Monday, March 26, 1956. On Sunday, March 25, No. 4, the first tram to run in Geelong, was chosen to make the last official trip in service with the closing of the Belmont route. To mark the occasion No. 4 car, with large posters wishing "Farewell and Good Luck" to Geelong, and other flag decorations, left the depot at 10.00 p.m. with an official party on board and proceeded to Moorabool and Malop Streets corner. On arrival it was given a rousing reception and the Mayor of Geelong, Cr. (later Sir Roy) Fidge, and the Mayoress, boarded the car, and with the mayor at the controls, the last trip to Belmont was commenced. As thousands of people had gathered, three other large trams were required to cater for those wishing to make a last trip.

A running commentary was recorded by 3GL radio station officers who travelled on the last trip, which was driven by Stanley Parker, who had 32 years of service, and conductor Eric Sweetten, 37 years of service. They were highly regarded veterans who had assisted to make the Geelong tramway-men so popular with the public.

When the tram commenced its last journey, it was followed by hundreds of motor cars and amid the clanging of bells and motor horns the tram travelled to Barwon Bridge, where Cr. Cameron of the South Barwon Shire was picked up, in the same place that he had been picked up 29 years before when, as President of the South Barwon Shire, he officially opened the Belmont extension and drove the first car to Belmont. He was welcomed on board by Mr. T. A. Farr and invited to drive the last trip to Belmont. It was indeed a pleasure to see Mr. Cameron's delight at this very thoughtful gesture. When the tram reached Belmont Mr. Farr added further to Cr. Cameron's delight by presenting him with the bell from No. 23 tram, which was the car he had driven to mark the opening of the route in December, 1927. Cr. Cameron very suitably replied and praised the tramway service and personnel.

Some difficulty in clearing the crowds to enable the return trip to be made was encountered; fortunately large crowds had been expected and 17 police had their hands full. On the return journey, cars 3 deep as far as the eye could see followed the car in. At the Palais Royal, the Palais band played "For they are jolly good fellows" and "Auld Lang Syne" while the car made a temporary stop, then proceeded to Moorabool and Ryrie Streets corner, the car which had been driven from Belmont by the Mayor, Cr. Fidge, came to a standstill amongst a very large crowd.

Mr. Farr made another typical presentation to the Mayor, Cr. Fidge. It was the second bell from No. 23 car, chromed and mounted as a gong and suitably engraved for the occasion. In reply, the Mayor said he was sure he spoke for everybody in Geelong when he expressed his appreciation of the service the trams had provided in the past and their gratitude to the Commission and the men that ran them.

Souvenir hunters were appropriating anything that was moveable on the cars. However, the final trip was run safely and without mishap. The car returned to the depot and with the shouts of well-wishers and cheering still sounding outside, the depot gates closed and brought to an end a service which had greatly assisted in the development of Geelong.

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