

HANNA

STREET

HAPPENINGS...

A HISTORY OF THE SOUTH

MELBOURNE ELECTRIC

TRAM DEPOT

1925 - 1995

BY ALISTAIR FINCHER

FOREWORD

This is a brief tribute to the people who have worked at South Melbourne Tram Depot over the last seventy years. Unfortunately time constraints have prevented this from being a more comprehensive history.

To many people who walk through the depot gates this job becomes a way of life and more often than not, a second home, their workmates often a second family.

This work has been written to commemorate South Melbourne Depots seventieth year of existence.

If anyone can add to this I would be more than happy to hear from them. I can be contacted care of the South Melbourne Tram Depot.
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I would like to thank the following people for their help in compiling this work-

Jack Cregan
Frank Reardon
Noela Wright
Ray Roberts
Daniel Muston
Olaf
Don Storey

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Hanna Street Happenings

On November 12th 1925 a new tram depot opened. Built to cater for the increasingly common electric tram, it was located on the corner of Dorcas and Hanna Street in South Melbourne. Aptly enough it was named Hanna Street Depot. South Melbourne already had a cable tram depot in Victoria Avenue. Obviously there could not be two South Melbourne Depots hence the Hanna Street name.

The new depot which wasn't finished being built until 1926 had a nine road shed, with two yard tracks although it was originally conceived as an eighteen road shed with two double entrances. The area to be occupied by the second shed was subsequently used as a per way yard.

The first line that Hanna Street Depot operated was the St Kilda via South Melbourne line to City Road where it terminated near St Kilda Road and connected with the cable trams.

The cable trams in operation since 1885 were dying a slow death as the new electric trams proved to be quicker and more efficient. Gradually the existing cable lines were dug up and replaced with new tracks for the electric trams.

On December the 27th 1925 new track was constructed from Hanna Street Depot via Park Street to Domain Road and St Kilda Junction. This allowed a tram service operated by Hanna Street Depot to run from St Kilda Junction to City Road pending conversion of the cable tram track.

During 1926 and 1927 Hanna Street began running more lines. These were East and West Preston, North Coburg, Elsternwick, Toorak and to the football in Flinders Street.

On February 14th 1937 all night services began running from Hanna Street. These trams were driver only operated and higher fares were charged than normal day services. "Q", "S" and "R" class trams were usually run on these routes. The all night services ran until 1957, when they were replaced with buses. According to ex union delegate Jack Cregan the all night trams were known as "Leaping Lenas". This was evidently because of the motion they made being single bogie trams.

On March 13th 1937 the South Melbourne Cable Tram Depot closed and many of the employees from that depot came to Hanna Street. The cable line from South Melbourne Beach to the city was converted to electric operation. It wasn't until September 20th 1960 that Hanna Street Depot was renamed South Melbourne. Even today however many of the old timers still refer to it affectionately as Hanna Street.

Over the years the depot has lost many of its routes to other depots. Elsternwick, Toorak, North Coburg, West Coburg, East and West Preston and South Melbourne Beach have all gone. In place however we have picked up a few new routes along the way.

On November 20th 1987 the new Light Rail service from St.Kilda Beach to east Brunswick opened and this was followed by the Port Melbourne to Exhibition line opening on December of the same year. These services replaced old train services amid great opposition from the locals against losing the trains. These lines have proved very popular however, and one very rarely hears anyone these days lamenting the loss of the trains.

On April 28th 1994 the City Circle Tram line opened operated by South Melbourne Depot. The rides on these trams are free and are probably the only free public transport in Australia.

I almost forgot to mention that South Melbourne Depot has also run the world's first tram car restaurant since its inception in 1983. The drama that often accompanies these trams is worthy of a book on its own. Two hours driving these trams has the same affect of feeling like you have been driving for eight. Speaking from experience I know what I am talking about. Originally there was only one of these trams in the depot but now there are three of the wretched beasts. I shouldn't complain too much because over the years they have bought a lot of work to the depot but getting along with the crews that work on these trams is often like walking on a tight rope.

I think they often forget that they are in fact working on a tram and it doesn't matter how smoothly one drives bumps often happen and the result (heaven forbid!) spilt wine. Other complaints are that the driver is going too fast or, too slow or that they could have avoided dewiring the trolley pole.

Another pitfall that the new restaurant driver must be aware of is to return the tram to the pick up point facing the same way as it left. This is because the loading doors are on one side only. If the tram is turned around the wrong way (by unplanned shunting) the passengers have to disembark onto the roadway causing a dangerous situation. It is also a long embarrassing and complicated procedure to return the tram to its correct position.

One driver after having words with a waitress one night said to the waitress "Which way are those points set?", she replied "They're going into the depot, you can't do that". He responded "Yes I can. I'm sick". "No your not", she said. "Yes I am, I'm sick of you" and promptly drove the tram with a full load of patrons through the depot gates and went off sick. The patrons had a lovely tour of the depot yard.

An ex union delegate (Chris Jacobson) once described the restaurant tram as a "1920's tram decked out like an Edwardian whore house". I'm not sure that I would agree with him but a colourful description none the less.

Not a great deal is known about the early day's of the depot or the people that were part of it. I'm not sure if there is anyone still alive that worked there during the 1920's and 30's.

Conditions in those early days were tough. During the depression of the 1930's many people left the job, those who stayed had their wages cut from five pounds, two shillings to three pounds, eleven shillings and their work considerably increased. Union leadership responded by saying it was good enough for the Labour Prime Minister Mr Scullin it was good enough for them.

In 1939, life was made a lit bit easier when working hours were reduced by eight hours a week. Life soon became hard again with the outbreak of World War II in September 1939. Many men from Hanna Street enlisted and several lost their lives while fighting overseas.

In 1942 lighting was reduced on trams and buses. Stopping places were reduced to save wear and tear on equipment. The Tramway Board was directed by Manpower Authorities to increase working hours to thirteen day fortnights until October 1945. During this time (May 17th 1945) the lease on Hanna Street Depot was renewed for another twenty years.

A former inspector from South Melbourne, Frank Reardon remember those early days and the hardships people went through. Frank started on the job on may 23rd 1932 at the age of fifteen. He entered the service as an oiler boy at the South Melbourne Engine House in City Road. When the cable cars were phased out in 1940 he became a bus driver and then in April 1954 graduated to Depot Starter being appointed to Hanna Street Depot in 1955 where he remained until his retirement in 1981. He was only months short of serving fifty years on the job.

One of the brighter things that Frank remembers of the depot was "Christmas Day In The Workhouse". This was put on every year by a long time employee and ex union delegate Bill Carville. Because of the nature of shift work many employees are unable to spend Christmas day with their families or in many cases don't have families to spend Christmas with. Bill remedied this by putting on a lunch that basically went from 8 o'clock in the morning to eight or nine o'clock in the evening thus covering most shifts. Bill Carville retired in 1969 after forty years service at Hanna Street. He worked tirelessly for the depot, often working in the canteen during his meal break. He also played football for the depot in his early days.

Jack Cregan, a former conductor and to my knowledge our longest serving union delegate (twenty three years) recalls that amongst all the hardships the trammies were always able to have a laugh and often indulged in practical jokes. He recalls that one night he and some others took the pants off a fellow conductor and handed them into lost property. The poor victim eventually had to come downstairs to revenue minus his pants to claim his property. He only then got his pants back after he filled out the appropriate lost property form!

Another night Jack and his friends lowered the same hapless conductor onto the verandah roof and left him there. It was only after the depot starter called for him several times that they discovered him perched precariously on the verandah roof. Jack said the only reason they picked on this poor man all the time was because he always took these pranks with good humour.

When Jack Cregan started on the job in 1947 Hanna Street was a thriving depot with one hundred and sixty five tables and about twenty assistant conductors. Melbourne still had a thriving public transport system. The assistants helped the conductors on trips and places where there was heavy loading. Sadly today all the full time assistants have gone.

Jack Cregan also recalls that the depot managers or depot masters as they were called in those days could be very hard and difficult men. Some might say they haven't changed much. He remembers one manager in the 1950s, a Mr McLean ordering the spare conductors and drivers to clean the depot windows. This came to a head one day when the manager spotted a particular conductor sopping wet about to go out on the road. The manager asked him how he got like that to which the conductor replied that he had been cleaning the windows like he had been instructed to. The window cleaning quickly came to an end.

The 1960s saw more changes come to Hanna Street. On September 20th of that year the depot was renamed South Melbourne Depot. This was because Hanna Street was renamed "Kingsway" and the once quiet tree lined street became a treeless stinking highway linking Queens Parade to King Street in the city. Jack Cregan remembers before Kingsway was built Sturt Street just around the corner from the depot would regularly flood, often reaching heights of two feet. Obviously in these conditions the trams couldn't run on this route.

On the ninth of June 1963 tragedy struck the depot when Driver Dan White was electrocuted while climbing on the roof of a tram trying to untangle a trolley rope. It was after that tragic incident that the union put a ban on drivers and conductors climbing on the roof of trams.

Early in the small hours of Monday 26th June 1967 South Melbourne Depot was the centre of world wide interest. It had been chosen to represent Melbourne in the television programme "Our World. The programme was controlled and operated by the BBC in London with fourteen countries taking part. It was transmitted simultaneously to twenty three countries via three American satellites orbiting 23,000 miles above the Earth. It was viewed in the homes of approximately 500 million people.

The actual Melbourne telecast lasted for one minute and thirty seconds and it showed the depot with its fleet of trams lined up ready for the road. The conductress Irene Stepien was shown signing on for duty with depot starter Jack Lister looking on. Bill Sires was seen to get tram 774 ready for the road.

Even in the 1960's conditions in the depot could still be rather primitive. Noela Wright recalls that when she started at South Melbourne in 1960 there was no hot water and it was some time before this was remedied. I believe that until the 1950s the only form of heating in the mess room was provided by the open fire place, the wood for this being supplied by the Tramways Board.

The year 1963 saw the first employment of university students during vacation period to the Tramways. In 1965 it was reported that car parking space was critically short at the depot. That situation certainly hasn't changed much!

In September 1969 the poverty wage was that below \$40.00 a week. The starting rate of a conductor was \$41.20 a week. As one union delegate pointed out this was appalling considering there was a critical staff shortage and that they had to be prepared to work all types of shifts. At that stage the railways were subsidised by the Government whereas the tramways were not.

Nineteen seventy saw the retirement of Major General Sir Robert Risson, chairman of the board since 1949. Hated by the unions, he is today credited with saving Melbourne's tram system. Melbourne had hired American consultants to prepare a transport plan for the city. The same consultants had persuaded Brisbane to scrap its trams a few years previously. But Sir Robert made sure he was on the supervising committee and fought the consultants until he extracted a grudging admission that Melbourne was entitled to keep its trams.

Jack Cregan recalls that when union representatives would have meetings with Major General Risson, the Major could distinctly be heard tapping the leg of the table with his foot to get a no vote from other members of the Board concerning some issue. The Secretary of the Union at the time, Clarrie O'Shea would get up in anger and announce that the meeting was over unless the Major General ceased tapping the leg of the table. I believe it worked every time.

Over the years I have worked with some funny and wonderful people and have had some colourful experiences as a result. I remember my first week out on my own as a conductor. I was working with a new female driver, a certain blonde lady who shall remain nameless as she is still with us.

Driving down Fitzroy Street the tram came to a screeching halt, throwing me virtually from one end to the other. The emergency brake had to be used, which literally means throwing the tram into reverse. The new driver obviously very proud of herself at missing a car opened to cabin door and said "That was close wasn't it, but at least I missed it". Ashen faced I shakily agreed. The driver then proceeded to take off, forgetting that the tram was still in reverse and again attempted to do me mortal injury.

Some time later the above said driver while taking a curve rather quickly happened to glance into her mirror to see a shopping jeep being propelled into space out the open door. The worse part was the most distressed owner was attempting to follow it. I am told that the jeep and owner were returned to the tram safely.

Another of my favourite stories was that of a long term female employee who when doing stand by shifts would come to work with her ironing board strapped to the roof of her Volkswagon. With a whoosh of steam she would then proceed to do her ironing courtesy of the Tramway Boards electricity!

One flamboyant driver the late Andrea Brooks was called into the managers office. "Where are you going with that radio driver?" he asked "That's not a radio it's my cosmetics case". She then turfed the contents comprising various lipsticks, perfumes and powders onto the managers desk. "Now I'm going out onto the road for a couple of hours and I expect to see all those things back in the case when I get back". Flouncing out of the office she muttered "Radio indeed!", leaving a bewildered manager to repack her make up case.

THE WOMAN OF HANNA STREET

It wasn't until August 1941 that women were employed by the Tramways Board. This was brought about by the outbreak of the Second World War and subsequent loss of male employees who went into war service. The new women conductresses filled the gap, Hanna Street receiving its fair share. After the war however all the women were sacked and it wasn't until September 8th 1947 that they were re-employed.

Women however were not allowed to go driving, various arguments being put forward to justify this. Some of these were that women might force the men out of jobs or that the strain of driving might be too much for them and could endanger passengers and other tram crews. This came to a head in 1956 when a Hanna Street depot trainer Bill Leyten refused to train a women conductress, Chris Wise as a driver. In March 1956 a stop work meeting was held banning training of women as drivers.

The meetings attitude was not taken to kindly by conductresses. At least four spoke strongly against the resolution. One conductress said that "the instructors who had refused to continue teaching women trainees with years of service did not hesitate to teach newly arrived migrants".

It was not until late 1974 that women were finally allowed to go driving. All depots except for Essendon and East Preston voted "Yes". Noela Wright, South Melbourne's first woman driver commenced driving in 1975. She said that in those early days she encountered a lot of hostility from other crews especially those from the depots that voted against women drivers. These days hardly anyone looks twice at women drivers but it is hard to believe that only twenty years ago the situation was vastly different.

In July 1970 a women's column was commenced in the "Tramway Record" by "Forise" of Glenhuntly. "Forise" stated "this column is designated to hear all the girls from every depot together, to discuss our needs and conditions we are not happy with!" The second column was written by Eileen Leehane from South Melbourne. How successful this column was I don't know.

"Forise" said "I believe that South Melbourne were voting in favour of women drivers, which proves that the majority are modern thinking individuals to whom congratulations are in order" (March 1971). At the time this was written there were no women inspectors or ticket checkers.

Forise also stated that hairdressing bills are increasing and it is a complete waste of money to have an expensive hair do only to have it ruined but the wearing on a tramway hat in the heat of summer, we must take some action to enable the wearing of hats in the hot weeks to be optional to conductors as well as drivers...."

The last head of the Tramways Board (Robert Risson) tried to run the job on the military lines so hats were compulsory. This was not only out of date but unacceptable to the majority of workers.

Another complaint from the women in 1971 was that they were only issued with one skirt per year and had to hand the old one in, whereas the men were allowed to keep their old trousers.

Our first women union delegate Denise Stephens was elected in 1987.

Our first senior depot trainer and the only female senior depot trainer in the service, Margaret Drew was appointed in 1994.

INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES INVOLVING SOUTH MELBOURNE DEPOT

Since its creation in 1925 South Melbourne Depot has been strongly involved in the union movement and has been involved in many battles for better pay and conditions. Jack Cregan said that South Melbourne was always a very militant depot, always leading the way. It was known as the "Flagship Depot"

I don't have a great deal of information concerning industrial action in the early days.

One of the first big disputes that Hanna Street was involved in was a strike during the Victorian Centenary celebrations of 1934. The strike was for a pay rise of two shillings extra a day. Picket lines were held at each depot. There was outrage in some sections of the community over the timing of the strike during the centenary celebrations. During the strike there were some suggestions that trams should be abolished altogether, "for never have the roadways been so easy to negotiate all types of traffic".

Mr A Cameron, chairman of the Board was quoted as saying that the trammies "are nothing more than a lot of gunmen and racketeers". He also said that "unlike other workmen, tramway men work in uniforms provided by the Board. All received twelve days annual leave on full pay. They travelled to and from work free and in addition were provided with six free passes good for full fare on any line each week

On the twenty first of February 1950 to April 23rd all depots went out on strike for a one pound a week pay rise, On March 16th the Tramways Union was de registered. On March 30th an emergency, bus service was provided by the Board with volunteer drivers and Red Cross society member as hostesses. This strike put tremendous hardship in the striking workers. Jack Cregan recalls rattling tins on Railway stations and getting donations from the Clarendon street traders. In the end Jack Cregan and five other trammies went to Mildura picking grapes to make some money. Jack ever the unionist went on strike while picking grapes - this time over not being paid!

On January 20th 1951 a one day strike which "snowballed dramatically" arose from a Hanna Street dispute. Four hundred Hanna Street employees struck in protest against new rosters which they claimed worsened their working conditions. Three other depots decided to join the stoppage.

On September 21st 1957 the members of Hanna Street Depot decided to hold weekly two hour stoppages until the Tramways Board gave into their demands over a roster dispute. The meeting of the depot members condemned the Boards attitude to the union claims for an improved roster which would avoid early starting times to broken shifts.

In 1980 the Lonie Report advocated the scrapping of eight rail lines and seven tram routes. Every possible tram type of action was taken to resist their proposals such as stoppages, issuing petitions, placing adverts. \$600,000.00 was to be spent on freeways.

In 1981 chemists in Prahran were selling pre-paid tickets. Members from South pickets the chemists and handed out leaflets. The chemists stopped selling.

On the 18th August 1988 about 100 members of the depot marched on the opening of the new MET shop to protest the decision by the M.T.A. to have it staffed but Municipal Officers Association members and to draw public attention management intentions to sack conductors.

The members marched up Dorcas street to St Kilda Rd and boarded two trams to Flinders street where everyone assembled under a banner and placards inscribed "save connies jobs", "trade offs for wage rises", "no cutbacks" and marched down Elizabeth street to a sausage sizzle South Melbourne was the only depot to take part in the demonstration.

In January 1990 South Melbourne became involved in the five week tram blockade of the city. This became about because of the Governments intention to get rid of conductors and introduce a "scratch ticket" system. For five weeks the trammies who were not on strike and were willing to work battled to save conductors jobs.

During this dispute the South Melbourne tram depot was for form quiet despite the lack of moving trams. Each day the drivers and conductors had a busy schedule of protest action. Lunch at the depot was free due to the generosity of local traders and South Melbourne market who donated food to the depot. The dispute put tremendous hardship on the depot members and like the big strike of 1950 many people resigned from the job.

TRAM TYPES AT SOUTH MELBOURNE DEPOT

In 1919 the Melbourne and metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB) was formed. Its objectives was to take over the various cable and electric tramways and unify them into one efficient system. On gaining control of the tramways to MMTB inherited a large number of trams of different types. It was clear that a standard vehicle was needed, not only to replace them but to allow for future expansion of the tramway system. This is how the famous "W" class came about.

When Hanna street Depot opened in 1925 it received a mish mash of there diverse tram types. Although most of the rolling stock was made up of the new 8 wheel trams there was a number of smaller four wheel trams that were used in service. These included, A, M, Q, T, B, H and X class trams. These were gradually replaced by the W tram as they came off the production line. A number of the small single bogie trams were kept however for the all night trams which commenced on 1937.

South Melbourne remained largely a "W" class depot until the late 1980 when it received the new modern "A" class trams which were used on the new light rail lines. These were later replaced by the "Light Rail Vehicle" or "B" class which were articulated.

South Melbourne also had for a brief time the "Z" class trams that were introduced to Melbourne in the 1970's They were brought to South to be used on the newly introduced driver only lines. These were returned to other depots when South Melbourne Depot lost the South Melbourne Beach line.

Sadly the life of Hanna Street/South Melbourne Depot is coming to an end. In the next eighteen months the depot will be demolished and a new one created in Montague, near Port Melbourne.

But beware though, the ghosts of Hanna Street are a noisy lot. Those people lying in bed in their fancy new apartments on the old depot site, may be awakened in the wee hours by the sounds of trams and their crews long since gone.

HANNA STREET DEPOT
EMPLOYEES
WHO SERVED IN THE ARMED FORCES
DURING THE WAR
1939-1945

ROLL OF HONOUR

ATKINS E	HENNERY N.W	MCNEIL S.HD
BAXTER B.F	HENSON H.L	NEWELL G.R
BOXSHALL A.V	HOLT C.F	NEWLAND J.R
BRACHER J.C.W	HORDERN K.H	NICHOLSON C.E
BRADSWORTH L.C	JARRET J.L	O'BRIEN J.F
BREEN A.J *	JENKINS B.L *	O'DONNELL C.E
BURLAND W.R	JENKINS J.J	OLLEY E.L.G
CARSON K.A	JOHNSTON A.T	ONLY K
COLES C.L	KILPATRICK A	PATON J.W
COLLINS R.V	KLUNDER M.D	PHELAN W
COOK R.S.L	LAPSLEY A.F *	PHILLIPS D
CRITTLE W.A.G	LAYCOCK G.A	QUINLAND K.S
DALTON P.F	LENNON L.C	RENTON R.G *
DEMMLER T.T	LINKLATER A.L	ROBINSON J.W
DICKENSON C.H	LONG A.E.A	RYAN D.D
EDGAR C.McD	MACKENZIE A.J.A	RYAN D.M
ELMER L	MAY R	SMITH D.B
FARMER J.J.G *	MERCOVICH F.J	SNELLING R.K
FERNS A.V	MIDDLETON L.R	STANLEY J.G
FULCHER J.L	MILLER	STRETCH M.H
GARDNER F.D.F	MONTEITH A.D	VILLERS A.E
GIBBS J.P.M	MURPHEY T.J	WHEATLAND F.C
GORDON L.E	MCINTOSH R.D	WOODHOUSE D.A
GRANT A.B	MCNAMARA J.P	
HARPER A	MCNAUGHTON R.J	

* KILLED IN ACTION