

\$3.95*

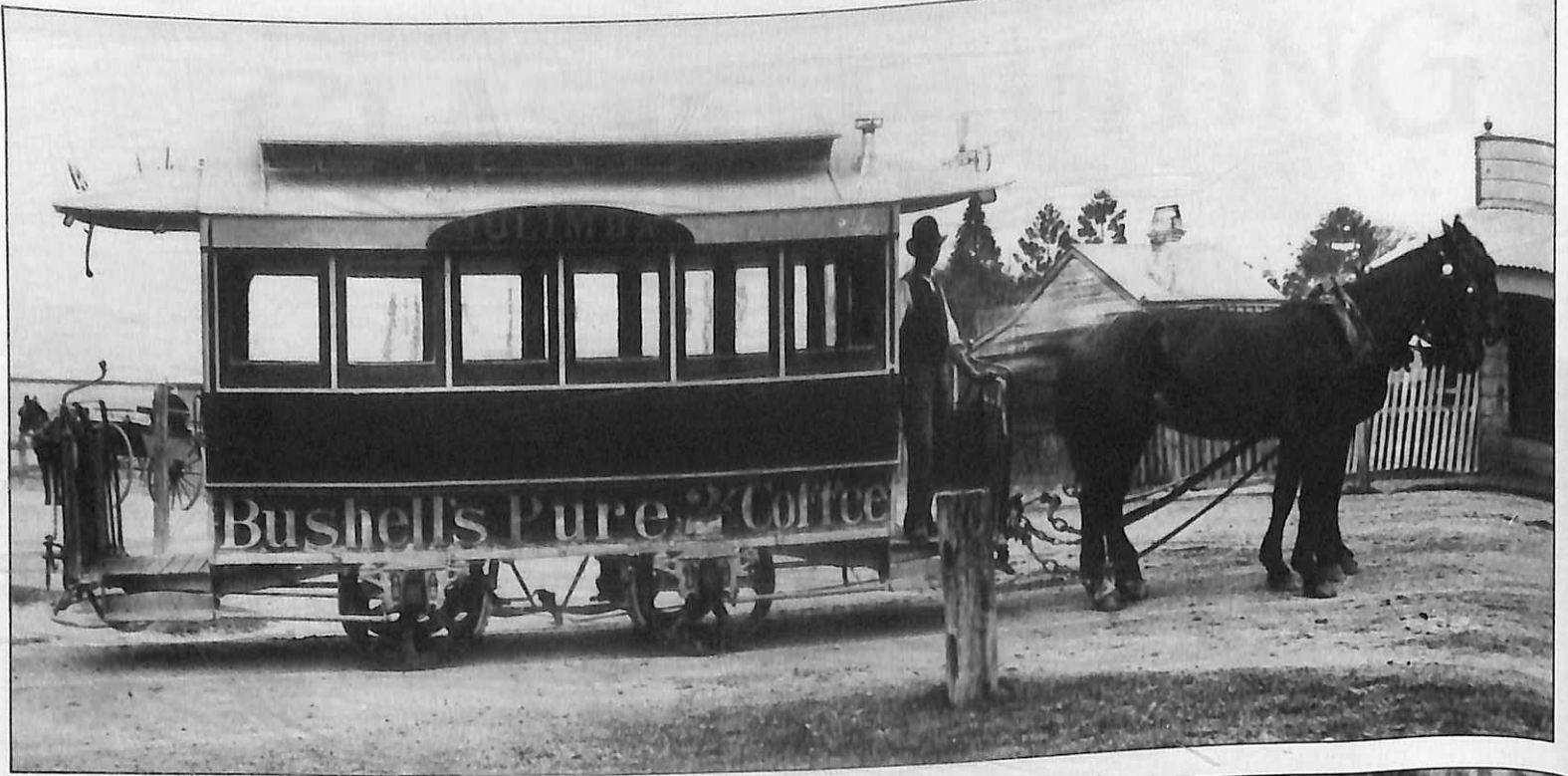
THIS AUSTRALIA

Published Quarterly

Winter 1982



- History at the Hotel Continental-Broome
- Art Deco Architecture • Tramway Heydays
- One Vast Haven-Tasmania



TRAMWAY HEYDAYS

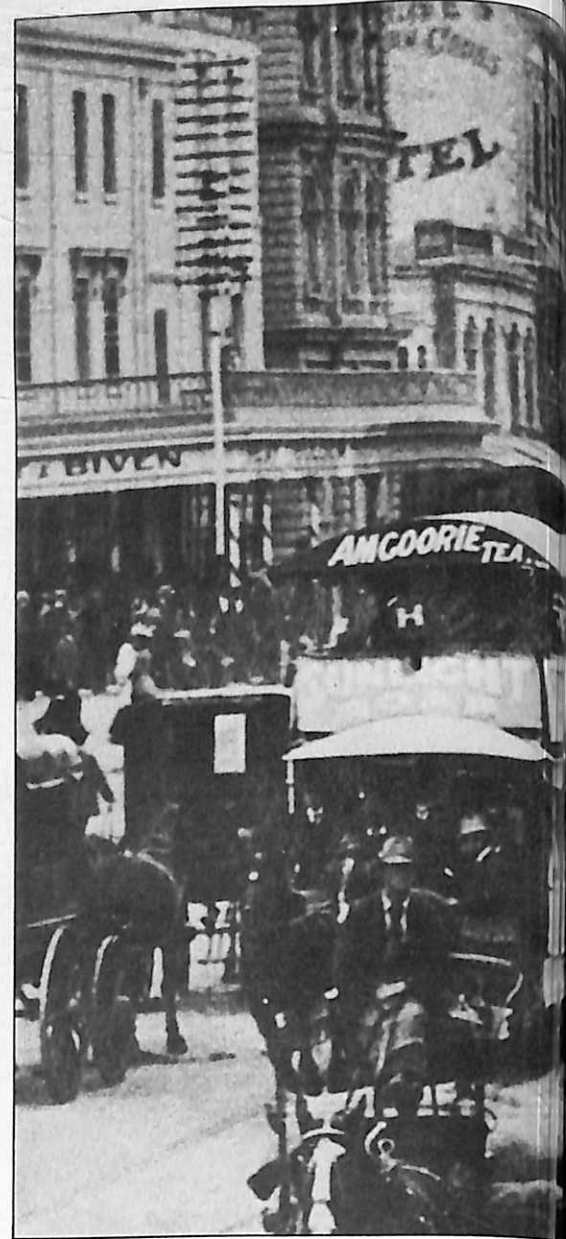
Dedicated tramway enthusiast Colin Jones investigates everything from horse trams to 'silver streamliners'

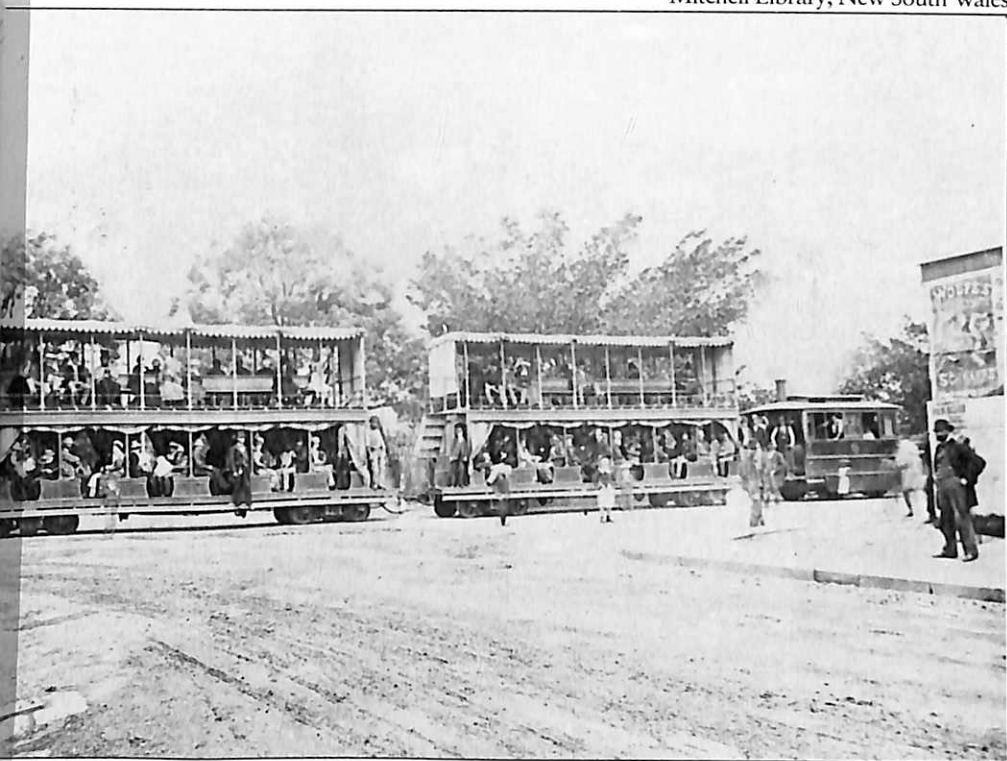
The tram, a vehicle moving along rails in the public streets, was an American invention. In New York in 1832 people first experienced the smooth progress of a horse-drawn tramcar and were able to make favourable comparisons with the omnibus, which jolted over the ruts and cobbles. In 1852 the introduction of grooved rails enabled the tramway to coexist with other traffic in the street without causing an obstruction to its wheels. As cities became larger and people needed some sort of efficient public transport, tramways soon spread all over the civilised world.

In Australia, Sydney was the first city to experiment with a tramway, to the design of an American gentleman with the fortuitous name of Train. The line, which

ran from the railway terminal to Circular Quay, was operated by four horse trams, but it used the old fashioned step rails that interfered with the other traffic. The line opened in 1861, but public displeasure led to its removal at the end of 1866.

The return of the trams first took place in Adelaide, where by 1875 there was a strong feeling that the buses and cabs were just not good enough. In that year the Adelaide and Suburban Tramway Company Limited was floated, and in the following year, Parliamentary approval was obtained to build a tramway, which opened on 10 June 1878. The tramcars were double decked, after the fashion of the day and drawn by two horses, with a third horse added for assistance on hills. So important did the tramways become in Adelaide that no less than eleven private companies were formed to build them. At their height, after 1884, the tramways covered more than 91 kilometres of the Adelaide streets and were operated by about 170 trams.





The horses were usually four year old light draught horses, and they lived and worked in pairs on the trams for about three years. During this time they worked two trips of about 11 kilometres every day except Sunday, when they worked only one trip. Pulling a heavily-loaded tramcar could be quite a strain for the horse, especially with the frequent stops and starts, and the companies had to be careful with them to preserve their investment. As a result they had to maintain large stables of about ten horses for each tram. After their work on the trams, many horses were retired to lighter duties on farms, where it is said that they would only start and stop to signals on bells. The drivers had a close relationship with their

Top left: an early horse tram in Brisbane

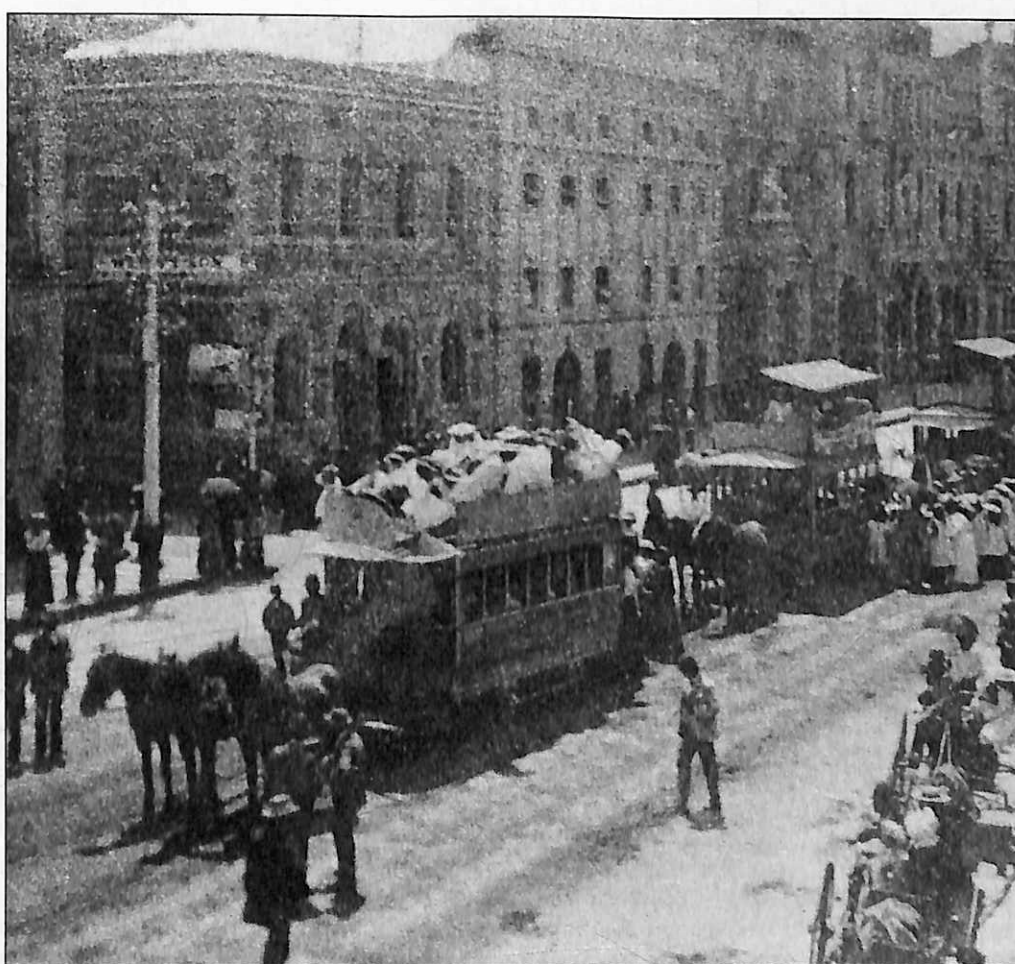
Left: a steam tram in Sydney 1880

Below left: Adelaide and Suburban Tramway Company's lunch hour 'specials' in King William Street c.1900

Below: double decked horse trams 'bumper to bumper' in Grenfell Street, Adelaide, in 1896



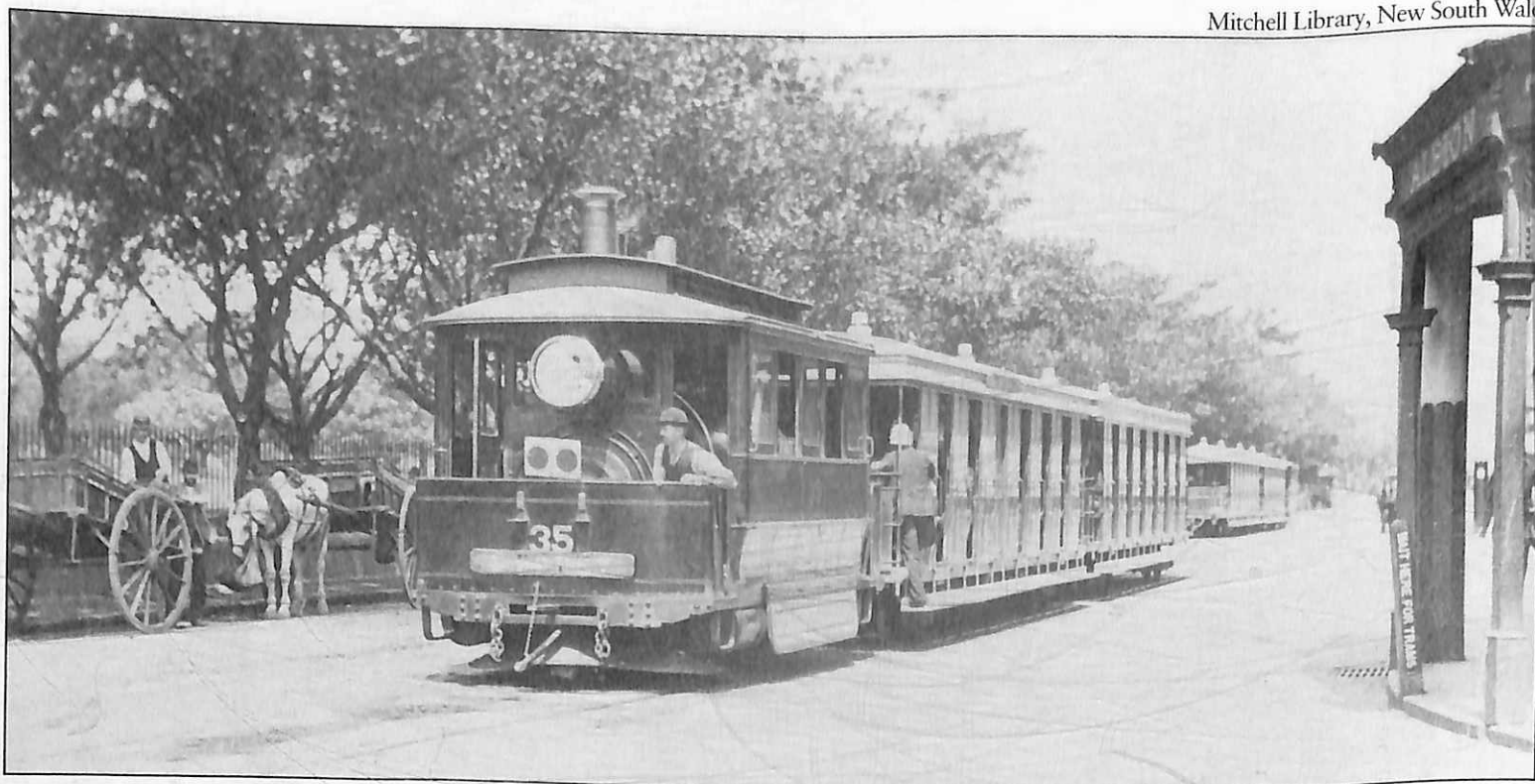
State Library of South Australia



State Library of South Australia

Compared with modern conditions, life on a horse tramway was a very leisurely affair. Services were slow, but if necessary the tram would stop anywhere at all, even at houses next door to each other, and they were even known to wait if a passenger had to run back for something that had been forgotten.

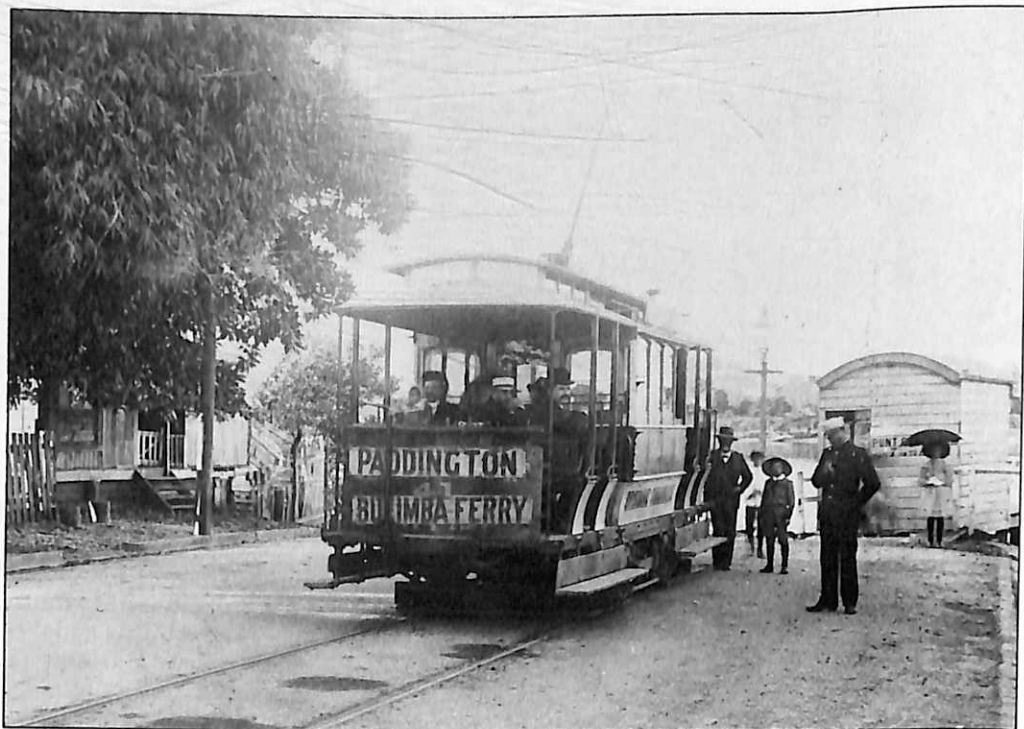
horses and were dependable men; but as conductors, the companies employed youths between thirteen and eighteen years of age, whose wages might be cheap, but whose discipline could be a problem. Thus there were strict rules that the conductor could not call out to his mates on other trams, could not play



to resuming their journeys in the other direction. At the foot of Elizabeth Street in the peak hour one tram shunted every twenty seconds.

The electric tram was the vehicle which was to replace them all, and the technology of the electric tramways was perfected in America by 1888. In the same year, at the great Exhibition in Melbourne, Australia's first electric tram was demonstrated. At the end of the exhibition, the equipment was bought for Australia's first electric tramway, from Box Hill to Doncaster. Electric trams were also tried in Sydney in 1890 as an experiment, but for the honour of installing the first permanent system of electric trams in Australia, it was a neck and neck race between Sydney and Hobart, both of whose systems opened in 1893.

The electric tram was so superior to its predecessors that it has sometimes been regarded as a whole new type of public transport. Compared to cable lines its capital costs were very cheap, it was cleaner than steam, it provided a higher speed of service and it could climb any hills that were ever found on Australian tramways. On the debit side was the appearance of the overhead wires, but this weighed little against the manifold advantages of the new technology. The Sydney steam tramways had grown to a point where they were becoming badly congested and in 1899 the electric lines, having proved themselves in North Sydney, began to be installed, in what became a massive construction programme, throughout the city and the suburban



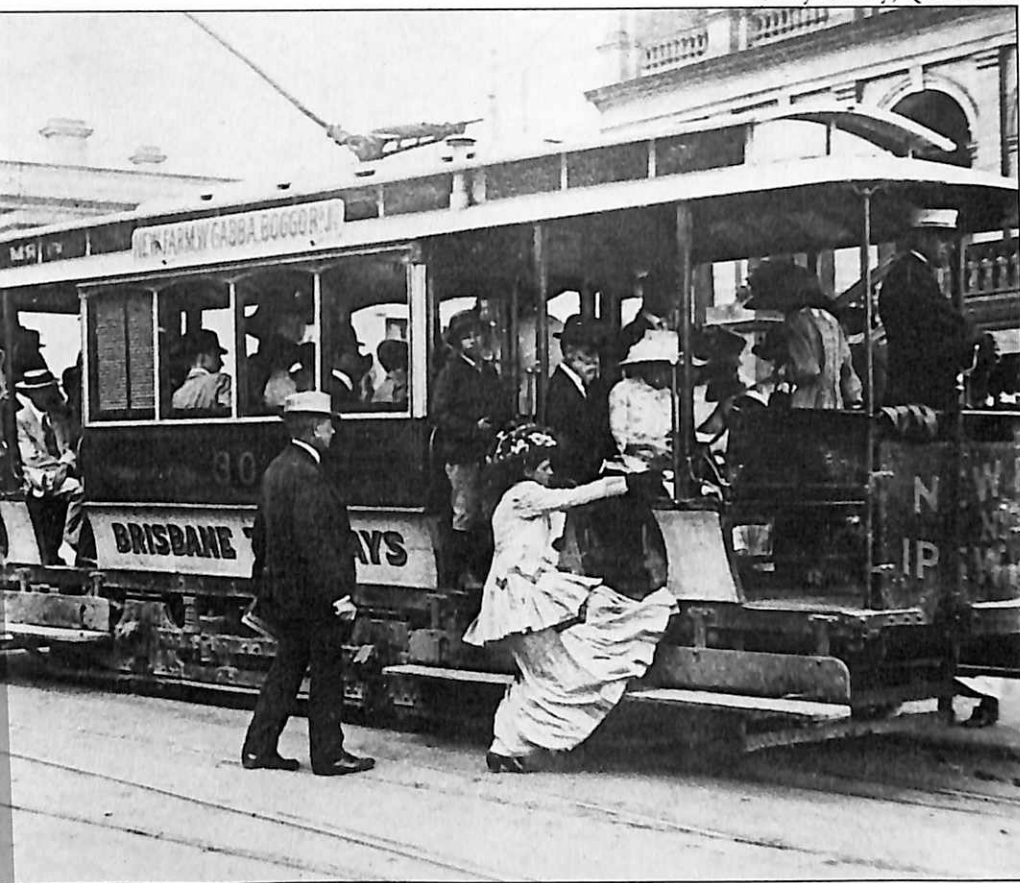
area. In common with experience overseas, tramway patronage rose in a most spectacular fashion. By 1914, when there were no less than 1423 electric trams running in Sydney, patronage was almost four times higher than it had been in 1899.

At this time, when John Bradfield was designing his scheme for the city underground railway and the Harbour Bridge, he would refer to the 'moving footway' of trams that was required to carry passengers from Central Station to Circular Quay through the city streets. The trams would frequently operate as coupled pairs, providing 160 seats and as many standing places as there was space

Top: steam tram opposite Hyde Park in Sydney c.1896. The city also had double decked trams, and by 1883 there were over 40 kilometres of tramway in Sydney

Above: Queensland electric tram c.1910

for a toe hold. The crossbench trams, open on both sides, were known as 'toast-racks', though, as the character in an Emile Mercier cartoon once remarked, they were far from warm. Up to the time that Sydney saw its first modern saloon trams in 1933, comfort was secondary to a phenomenal carrying capacity. The Sydney tramways reached their zenith in 1932, with 264 kilometres of electrified route on which almost 1500 trams were in

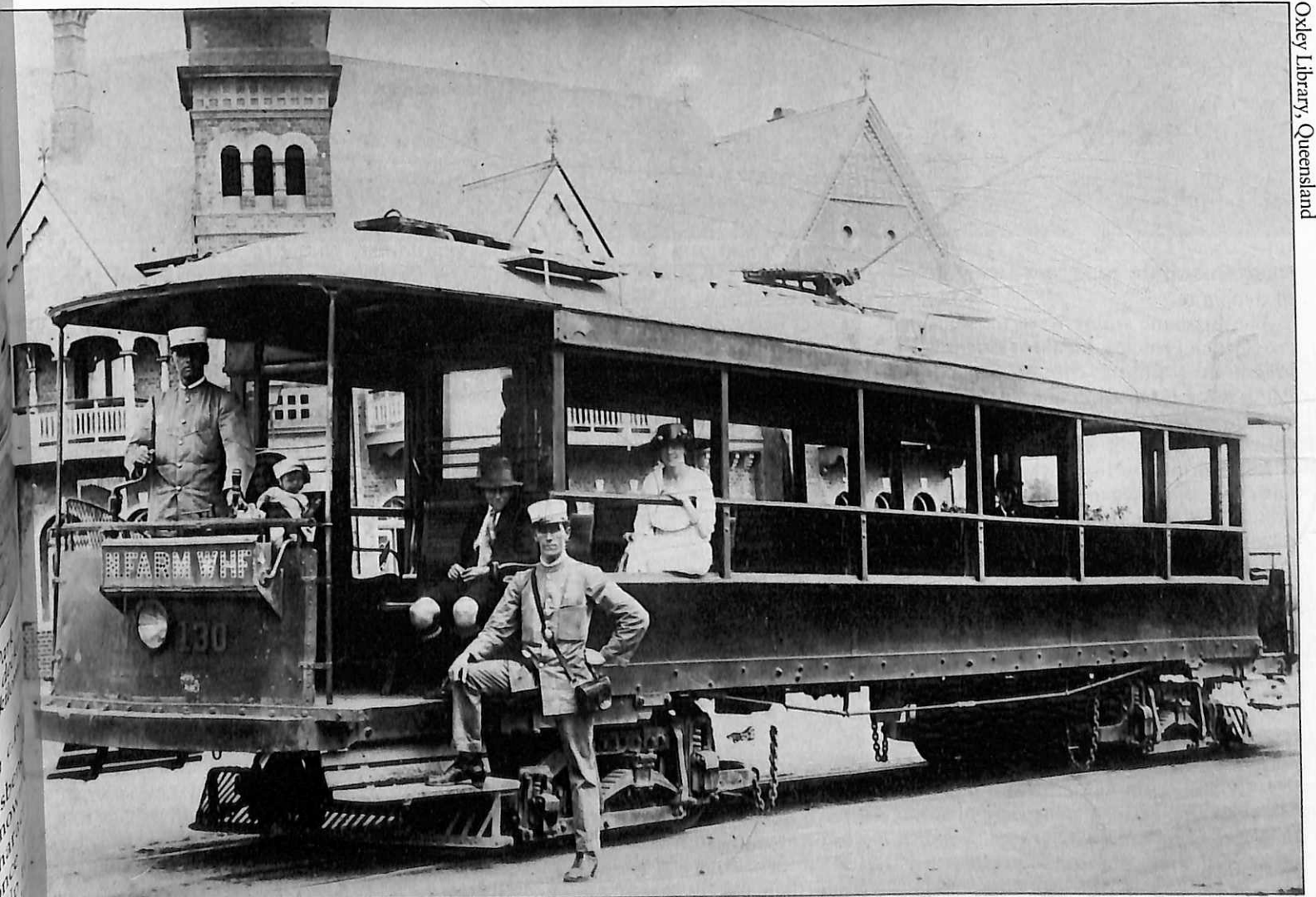


regular operation. It was one of the world's great tramways.

In Brisbane the first electric trams ran in 1897, replacing a rather inadequate horse system. The Brisbane Tramway Company was dominated by an American, Joseph Badger, who made it a showpiece of what a tramway should be. He also managed to ensure that, wherever he lived in Brisbane, a new tramway extension was always built past his house. Thus he was able to travel to work each day in his luxurious 'palace' tram. As a staunch private enterprise man, he had no time for unionism, and his attitude precipitated a major strike in 1912. The tramwaymen objected to his prohibition on their wearing their union badges on their uniforms and soon most had been suspended from duty for their refusal to abandon their badges. Although the strike was eventually broken, there were some nasty moments as unionists tried to wreck

Left: well-dressed passengers board a Brisbane electric tram

Below: bogie saloon tram in front of Chardon's Hotel, Annerley, Qld, then the Ipswich Road tram terminus, c.1920



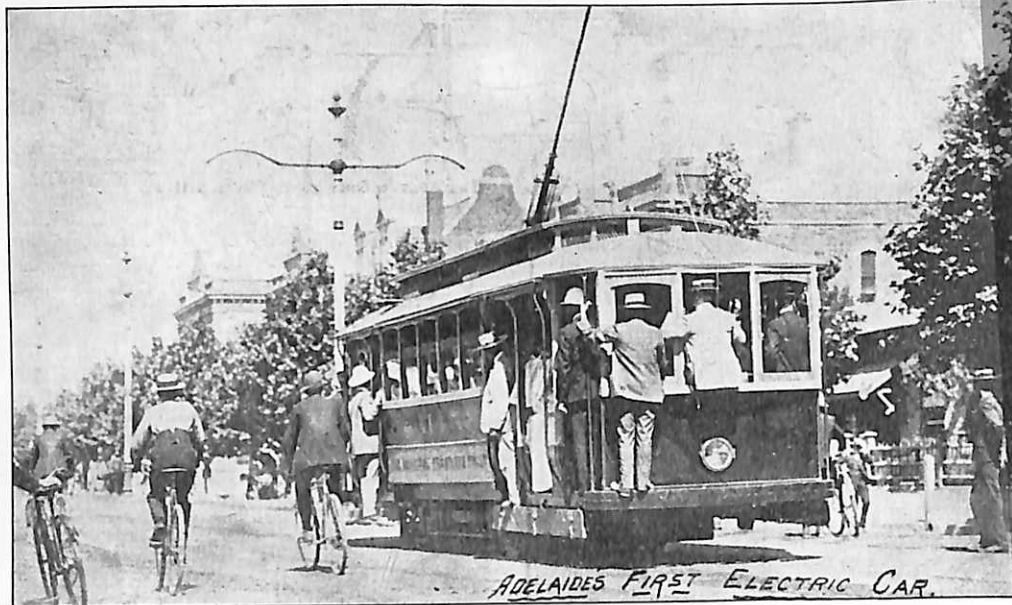


trams still on the road, once with the use of dynamite.

The Brisbane trams were mostly open crossbench vehicles, ideal for catching the breeze in a humid climate, but rather damp when it rained. Even the saloon cars which began to appear from 1908 were entirely innocent of windows. As in other cities, tourism by tram was encouraged, and the tram was featured in tourist literature as the ideal way to get about and to see the sights.

In Western Australia, Perth, Kalgoorlie and Fremantle gained their first tramways between 1899 and 1905 with typically American saloon trams. The design was retained until the end without significant modernisation, and one particular feature was the hooks at each end of the tram on which mothers could hang their prams.

In Melbourne the cable trams inhabited the city and, although much loved by the Melburnians, became something of a butt of Sydney wit for their lack of speed. A person who made a quick getaway was said to have 'shot through like a Bondi



tram'. Melbourne too had its electric trams to add to suburban pride. From 1906 they ran to Brighton and Essendon for the first time and soon they began to build their far-flung empires beyond the

Top: electric trams in King William Street, Adelaide. As well as the many trams, bicycles and horse-drawn buggies were still popular

Below: people crowd on, desperate to get a place on Adelaide's first electric tramcar, 1909



Above: electric trams and other traffic in Sydney's Kings Cross in 1949

cable termini. The Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust was a particularly enterprising institution, which in 1913 introduced that most Australian of all tramcar designs, the bogie drop-centre tram. A large, comfortable vehicle, it rode smoothly without the galloping motion common in four-wheel trams, it offered both open and enclosed seating and its steps were not too high. The idea was adopted in Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide, Launceston and to a limited extent in some other cities and, in modernised versions, it was in production as late as 1964.

By 1919 the days of private tramway companies in Australia were coming to an end and Melbourne set a pattern for future development with the formation of a semi-government authority, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board. The Board has proved so careful in its nurture of the tramway system that it has survived, almost intact, to be today, the largest tramway in the English-speaking world. One of the first tasks it set itself was the replacement of the cable trams, of which 592 were running in the Melbourne streets in the peak year of 1923. Through the late 1920s and the 1930s, the cable trams, the humble servants of the city, were slowly replaced

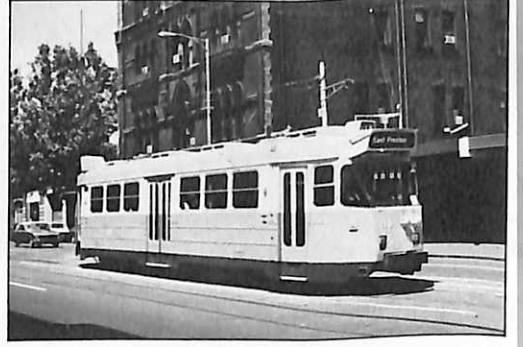
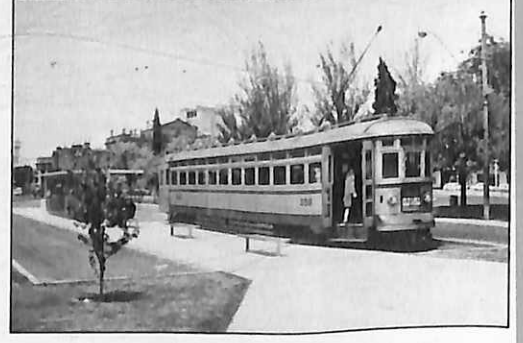
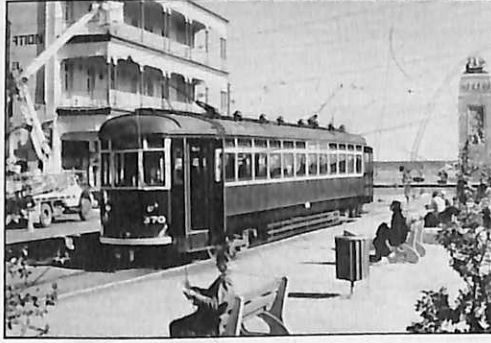
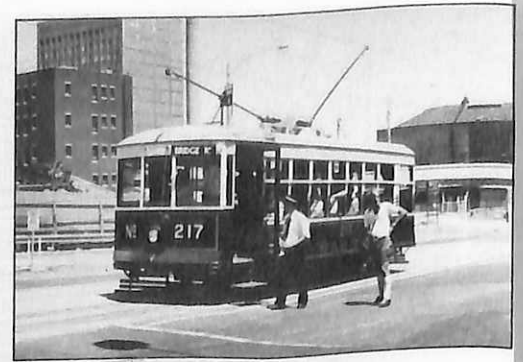
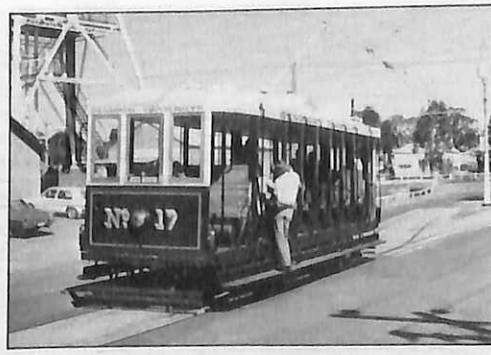
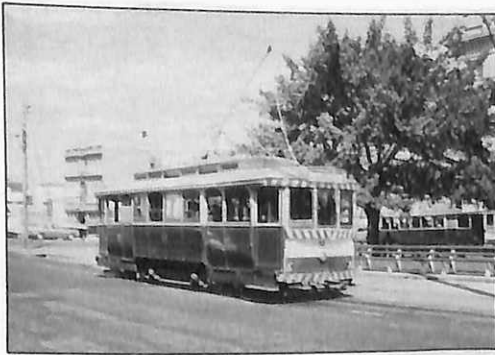
by the big smart electric trams. At a time when Sydney had ceased to expand its tramways and was thinking of double deck buses, Melbourne was laying more steel rail. It was an investment that has lasted.

Adelaide was the last major city to change to electric trams, in 1909. These were the particular creation of William Goodman, who headed the Metropolitan Tramways Trust from 1907 until 1950. Among the various place names which distinguish cities, Adelaide was unique in the world in having a tram that took its passengers to 'Paradise'. The Adelaide trams tended to be big and heavy, and when the Glenelg line was opened in 1929 its equipment was so like an electric railway that it managed to survive the general tramway closure of 1953-58. It runs today, still with its original trams in their 1929 livery, like a living piece of the roaring twenties.

Newcastle was a very late starter with its electric trams in 1923, and it shared with Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo in Victoria the distinction of operating mostly second-hand stock. Hobart was always different. It clung to its English-style double deck trams, squealing around sharp curves and teetering up steep hills, until one was blown over in 1946, after which they were all cut down to single

deck vehicles. The only true tramways in tropical Australia were worked by steam, in Rockhampton and Broome, and they were never modernised. The Broome tramways were destroyed by enemy bombing in 1942.

By the mid 1930s the tide had begun to turn against the tramways and a policy of closures commenced. In some cities such as Perth, Hobart and Adelaide, the trolley bus was thought to be the ideal replacement for the tram as it did not need a track and was able to pull in to the kerb at stops. Trolley buses were unnervingly silent, and they saw new routes constructed in these and other cities, through to the 1950s. They were regarded, however, as sharing a major fault with the trams; that of being confined to a fixed route. In many overseas cities the tram was being replaced by the motor bus, and so it was in Australia too. Steel was in short supply, track and trams needed replacing, and the bus provided a cheap solution. One by one the cities came to say goodbye to their trams; Newcastle in 1950, Kalgoorlie, Fremantle and Launceston in 1952, Geelong in



1956, and so on. The last days were times of both sad sentiment and of wild hooliganism, and the last tram was lucky to reach the depot without having most of its parts souvenired.

Citizens mounted protests against the closure of lines, and in Sydney at least, were able to have the trams restored in some places for a brief time, but in the end, time, like an ever running stream, bore them away. The motor bus was able to handle the reduced patronage that belonged to an age in which every family owned a motor car and, as often as not, used it for both recreation and the journey to work. Television also brought reduced patronage, both to cinemas and to trams.

Melbourne and Brisbane were the great exceptions. In Melbourne the last cable trams had been replaced in 1940, not by electric trams, but by double deck buses. These however, proved to be widely unpopular and, in a reversal of the usual historic process, new electric lines were built to replace the buses in 1955 and 1956. Brisbane built new tramway extensions up to 1951, with magnificent silver streamliners to run on them. The Brisbane tramways might have survived until today but for a growing antipathy to them in the

*Reading left to right, top:
Trams at Ballarat City Terminus
Bendigo trams, now a tourist attraction
Melbourne tram, now owned by the Tramway
Museum Society*

*Centre: 'silver streamliner' trams, Brisbane, last
used in 1969*

*Tram on the Glenelg line, South Australia, still
used as public transport
Another Glenelg tram, South Australia*

*Bottom: three of Melbourne's trams, all still
running today—The classic 'open-door' tram, an
old-fashioned 'green' tram and sleek new 'orange'
tram*

Brisbane City Council administration. A further disaster was a fire in Paddington Depot in September 1962, which destroyed sixty-five of the city's fleet of 366 trams. The losses were replaced by buses, and the Lord Mayor, Clem Jones, established a firm policy that saw the last tram leave the Brisbane streets on 13 April 1969.

The trams in Ballarat and Bendigo survived to become museum pieces, but the retention of the Melbourne tramways was largely the doing of a great tramway administrator, Robert Risson. He was Chairman of the Melbourne and

Metropolitan Tramways Board from 1949 to 1970, during which time he defended the tramways, maintaining vehicles and track in top condition and providing regular and reliable services for the people. Although starved of money for new construction through the slow contraction of the profitability of the tramway system, he pointed the way to the future when new trams would embody the latest and finest technology from overseas, and run as much as possible in their own reservations separate from motor traffic, or even in tunnels under the city streets. No Melbourne tram exhibited the shabby appearance and peeling paint that was so common of the last years in Sydney. Robert Risson's successors have reaped the benefit of his sound policies and in 1975, trams began rolling off the production lines in Melbourne again. 'Trams,' as the staff recruiting poster proclaimed, 'are here to stay' and this was further attested by the opening of a 3.21 kilometre extension, the first for over twenty years, in 1978.

Melbourne's trams are becoming the very symbol of the city. The steel rails in the streets and the green or orange trams define it as a special place. ♣