

Norman Charles Boucher: VR motorman

Norman Charles Boucher was born on 12 August 1905.

He joined Victorian Railways on 12 October 1921, aged 16. In VR's 1923 list of employees, his position was "lad" in the Transportation Branch, with salary of 6 shillings and 6 pence. He still had the position of lad in VR's list of employees as at 24 November 1925, but at an increased salary – 11 shillings and 10 pence. By 1 January 1929 Boucher had become a tram conductor, with salary 15 shillings and 9 pence.

He was subsequently promoted to motorman, driving on the St Kilda to Brighton line and based at Elwood depot.

Boucher was described by his son (Geoff, who was born in 1935) as a character. By the start of the 1940s, the family was living at 37 Spray Street, Elwood, where Boucher remained until the end of his life.

While Boucher was at work his son used to deliver Boucher's dinner in an aluminium tiffin container – stopping his tram as Boucher drove past.

Shortly after Boucher was married, he brought home a baby from a previous marriage – his wife had no idea there was an earlier marriage or a child. [His previous wife may have died – could be Maisie Lilian Boucher, nee Frost, married in 1928, died in 1932 aged 24. According to BDM Victoria, Norman Charles Boucher married Hazel Battistoni in 1933.]

On one occasion the electricity went off on the hill from the Brighton Beach hotel which meant that the tram Boucher was driving could not move. Boucher got a coal truck to push the tram down the hill to the hotel, where he spent the rest of the day until the electricity came back on. An inspector came around and asked why the tram finished there by the hotel – it should have been halfway up the hill. According to his son, Boucher "liked a drink".

Boucher had one accident when he hit a brewery truck – the brewery sent him a couple of cartons of beer for his trouble.

One time a priest was travelling on the running board of Boucher's tram. Boucher shouted "get off the bloody running board". The priest did not move, so Boucher shouted at him again. The priest called "don't talk to me like that, I'm Father Coughlin from St Colomba's". Boucher responded "I don't care if you are Father Christmas from Myers, get off the bloody running board!".

Boucher had started playing football with the Glen Huntly depot team in 1927. Note that this was the first year in which Glen Huntly fielded a team however by the mid-1930s the team was known as Brighton-Glen Huntly. He continued playing until 1936 – in that year he received an award at the presentation night of the Brighton-Glen Huntly tramway football club.

A photograph of the Brighton-Glen Huntly team, taken at a match against Clifton Hill at Westgarth (Northcote – the home ground of the Clifton Hill team, according to the newspaper reports) on 17 May 1933, was donated to the Melbourne Tram Museum by Boucher's son Geoff. The team members are named on the reverse:

- Back row, left to right – R? Haughton, ? Carter, J Swallowell, L Mitchell, J Cosson, N Capp, T Barber, W Eccles

- Centre row, left to right – J Brown, Huston, Chandler, J Loftus, J Lawley (vice captain), N Boucher
- Front row, left to right – G Slade, J Richards (captain), W J Sheldon, H Bird

Clifton Hill won the match, 14.18.102 to 2.5.17 – Brighton’s goal kickers were Slade and Chandler. Best players on the Brighton side were Haughton, Slade, Loftus, Richards, Barber and Bird.

Boucher’s team mate John Joseph (Jack) Brown subsequently joined the Communist Party of Australia in 1935 and the following year was elected to the state council of the Australian Railways Union (ARU). In 1942 he became state secretary of the ARU and in 1944 served as federal president of the ARU. A brief biography of Brown can be found at <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brown-john-joseph-jack-12258>.

In 1938 Boucher acted as a goal umpire and the following year he was elected to the committee of the Brighton-Glen Huntly football team. In 1940 he was goal umpire for the grand final of the football competition.

His son has no memory of Boucher being involved in football, so his playing career must have ended by that time.

The Victorian Tramway Football Association (VTFA) elected Boucher as a life member of the VTFA on 18 March 1947. The hand-painted certificate (in the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum, donated by his son Geoff) was signed by C.A. Peterson (President), L. Montgomery (Treasurer) and R. Hodder (Hon Secretary).

In 1949 Boucher was elected Australian Railways Union (ARU) representative for Elwood depot – he was described as a moderate, with the representative having previously been a “militant” for a number of years.

In 1952 Boucher was part of the ALP industrial group when he was re-elected as tramway representative for the ARU – the other faction was described as “the left”. He was re-elected in 1953 and 1954.

According to his son and daughter-in-law (Shirley), around 1956 when sections of the VR St Kilda to Brighton Beach line were being closed, Boucher was re-located to Flinders Street, where he worked in the lost property office. There were stories about Boucher shunting engines at Spencer Street.

Boucher passed away in 1963, aged 57. He had previously had a heart attack, but went back to work (according to his son, “too early”) and died from a second heart attack.

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