

In the early days of Company operation, a poppet head overlooks the new electric cars and veteran horse cabs at the fountain.

CHAPTER 3

The Electric Supply Company Years

Purchase and Conversion

The efforts of the Bendigo Tramway Co. to dispose of its undertaking finally succeeded in February, 1899, when it applied to a Tramway Conference to sell out to the British Insulated Wire Company. A new company, of English origin, which subsequently became incorporated as The Electric Supply Company of Victoria Limited, was then in the process of purchasing the Bendigo Electric Company, and sought a 30-year franchise to instal and operate electric trams using the overhead wire system. The routes mentioned were to Eaglehawk, and between Golden Square and the Black Swan Hotel (later to be extended to Kangaroo Flat and White Hills). Preliminary approval was given, and a draft agreement was tabled a month later. It was optimistic as were the previous ill-fated battery and steam tram agreements, and quite likely would have had a similar result if carried out. The standard of track construction and the proportion of double track would have been high. A short extension at Eaglehawk from the

steam tram terminus in front of the Town Hall to the rear of the grounds at Darling Street was promised, together with a line from Mollison Street to Quarry Hill with a branch from it along Olinda Street into a hilly area south of the railway station. While the Councils were considering the matter in detail, residents of Mollison Street petitioned that the new Company should not be allowed to use their street for tramway purposes. They alleged that the steam tram company had built a double track without authority, and that various operations (shunting, cleaning fires, blowing-off, etc.) were a nuisance and detrimental to their property.

The new Company was established with a capital of £400,000 and subsequently purchased the Bendigo Tramway Company and the Bendigo Electric Company. It decided that the existing Mollison Street premises of the tramway and electricity undertakings were unsuitable for conversion and expansion. Consequently, work commenced in 1901 to erect suitable structures on land opposite the east end of Arnold Street, between a small creek and the



New rails for the electric trams replace the old steam tram track at Long Gully.

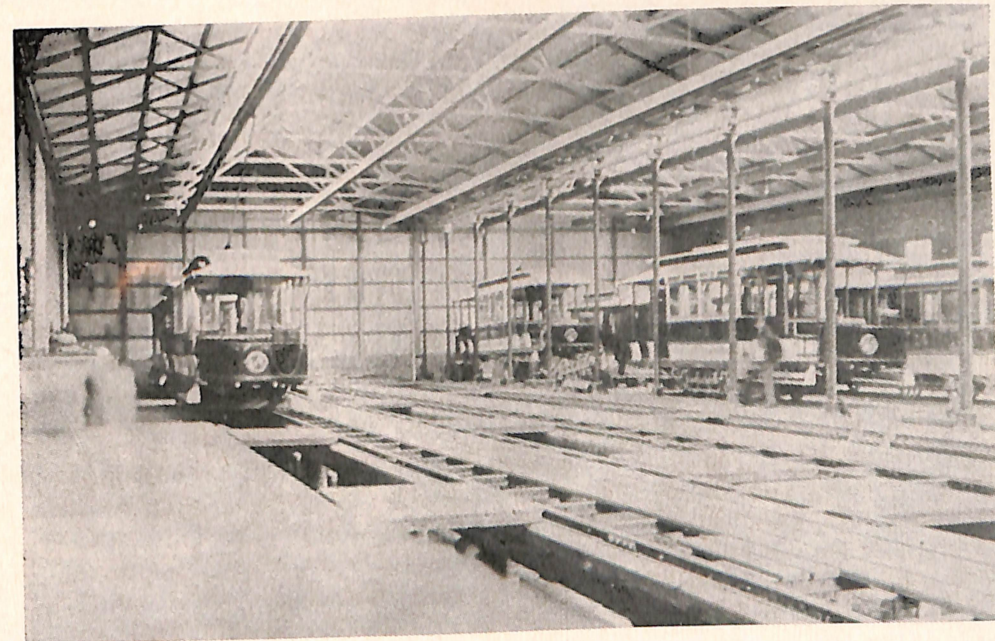
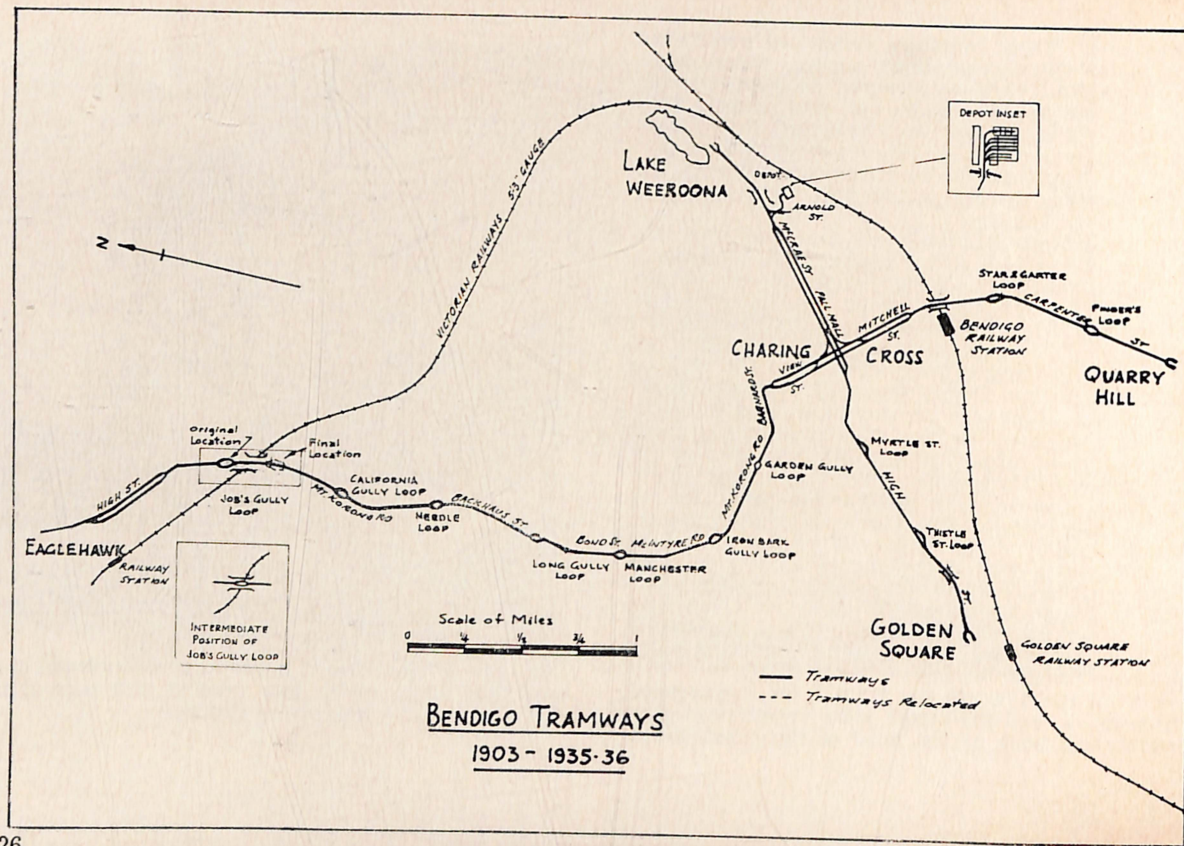
railway line. These buildings comprised generating plant, sub-station, workshops, stores, tram depot and offices, and were constructed on rather lavish lines, being of steel columns and roof trusses with red brick walls. Work on converting the steam tram tracks was deferred until January, 1902 so that the people would not be inconvenienced during the pre-Christmas shopping period and Victorian Gold Jubilee Exhibition.

The aforementioned track construction proposals had been diluted somewhat in the final agreement, and the Eaglehawk line had become mainly single track with seven passing loops, the only double track being in View Street, Bendigo, and High Street, Eaglehawk. The Lake Weeroona to Golden Square line was to be double track only from the city to Arnold Street (the Depot junction), although most of the Golden Square route was to be laid in single track off the crown of the road and thus suitable for duplication. The Quarry Hill route was to be double track to the railway station and then single with passing loops. The double track sections received centre poles with double bracket arms to carry the trolley wires, while all single track was side poles with span wires except that portion of the Golden Square route set out for possible duplication (poles on the crown of the road with single bracket arms) and the short extension at Eaglehawk (which was kerbside, and received kerbside poles with short bracket arms).

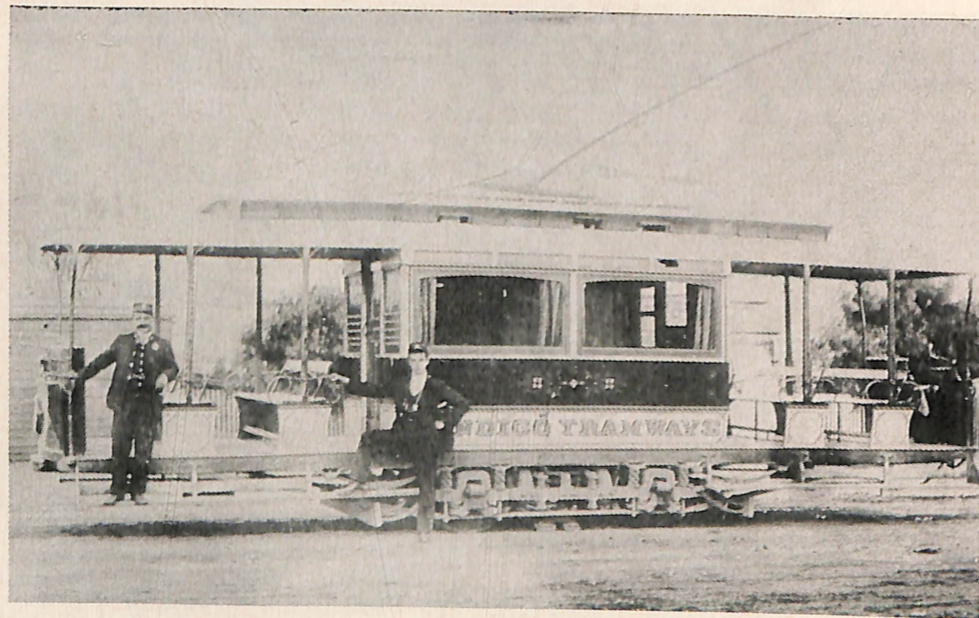
Work on the new electric tram track commenced at Eaglehawk, and the steam tram service was progressively cut back as the head of the construction



Aided by a horse drawn tower wagon, workmen erect overhead wires on the four bracket arm pole at the hub of the system.



Newly completed and partly constructed electric cars stand beside ex-steam tram trailers in the recently finished depot.



A proud crew pose with one of the first new lavishly appointed trams. Note the magnetic track brake mounted between the wheels.

proceeded towards Bendigo. On 24th June, 1902, it was reported that the steam tram service would soon be withdrawn, and additional men put on to hasten completion of the new track, which had been completed to Long Gully (about half way). By the middle of July the excavation had surmounted the Ironbark Gully Hill, and it was hoped to have the electric trams running before Christmas. Work was in hand in Pall Mall at the beginning of December, but delays were apparent with the construction of the tramcars for the new service. Eventually, the first trial run was made shortly after 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 8th April, 1903, when a tramcar left the Depot and ran to Charing Cross. Two evenings later passengers were carried between Arnold Street and the city centre — fare 6d. A trial was run to Eaglehawk the next morning (Saturday, 11th) and all went well except for a little trouble with a set of points at Charing Cross. A track gang was put to work and it was hoped to have at least two trams running to Eaglehawk for Easter Monday (13th), but a rail broke at Charing Cross and prevented the service being commenced. Cars were run in Pall Mall on the Monday and Tuesday, and finally commenced service to Eaglehawk on Wednesday, 15th April, 1903, with two trams in use. Rolling stock construction was hastened, and four cars were running a week later with two more serviceable two days after that. On Wednesday, 13th May, the first of the electric street lights were tested while on 30th of the same month the Company advised the Bendigo City Council that the Quarry Hill line was virtually complete and



Tramway uniforms used during early company ownership.

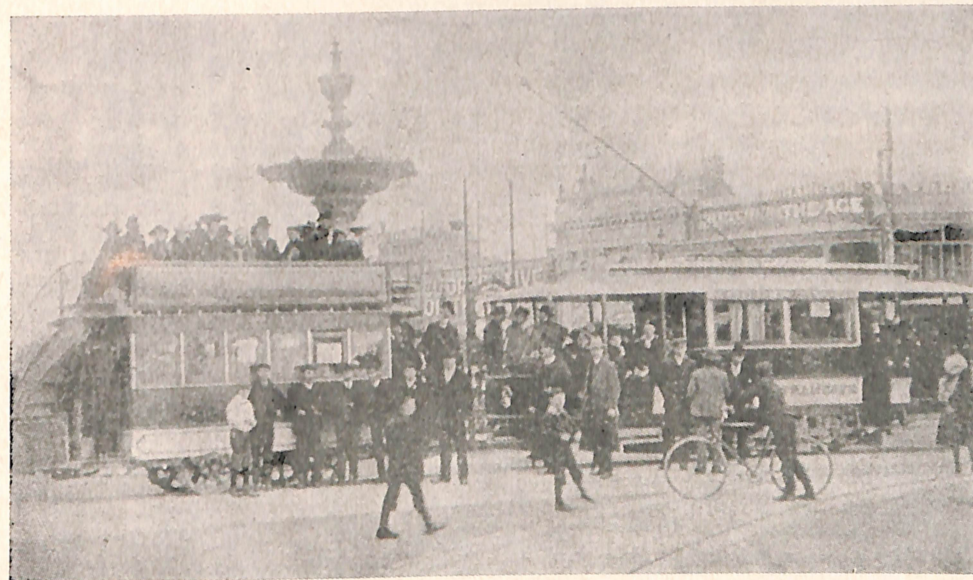


A three window electric car leaves Eaglehawk terminus ascending High Street towards Bendigo.

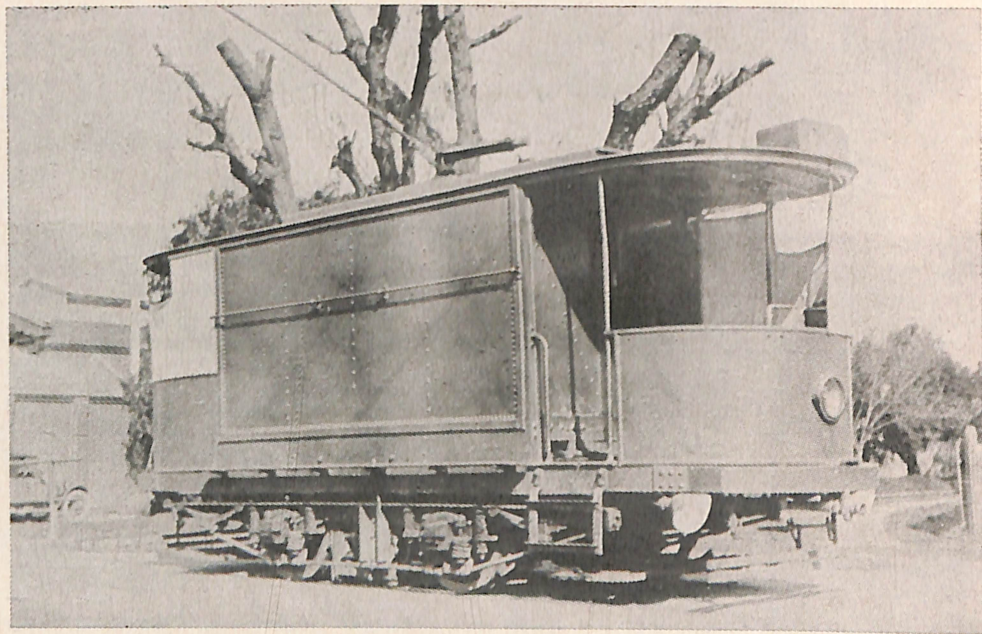
ready for inspection. However, a newspaper report a few days later stated that no poles or overhead wires had yet been erected. Subsequently, this route and the Golden Square to Lake Weeroona line were completed and opened for service.

Rolling Stock

The Adelaide firm of Duncan & Fraser had contracted to construct twelve new electric trams for the service. They were typical "California" open combination cars with a short centre saloon (with two large windows per side) and open end sections, on a straight sill and short wheelbase truck. They were the first electric trams constructed by this firm (apart from the 1888 experimental battery car, which was a standard double deck horse car, adapted), and the body construction was based on their very successful horse tram designs. This lightweight style created major problems many years later due to the higher operating speeds, greater passenger loadings and more intense usage causing the body timbers to "work" and become loose. During the 1930's and 1940's the surviving bodies were diagonally braced with steel sections in both longitudinal and transverse directions. These cars carried numbers 1 to 12. Their livery was originally Columbia Red with white lining and white with blue lining (later cream with brown lining). Numerals were in gold leaf with black shading and lettering in blue with brown shading. Roofs were white and interiors were in grained woodwork with pale green lining. The steam tram trailers were retained and used as trailers to the new electric trams, but the steam tram motors were sold.



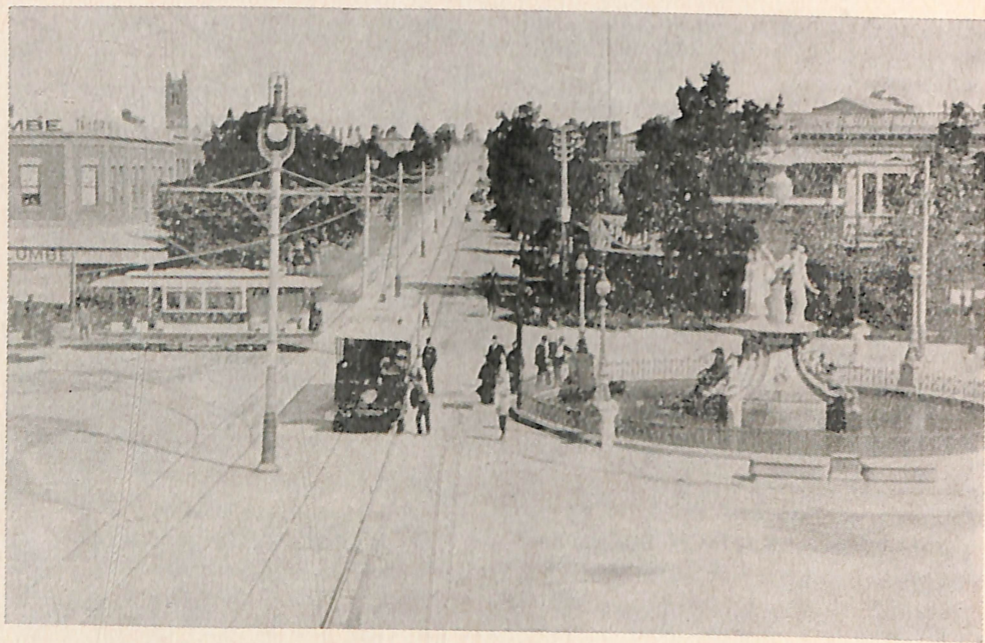
Electric haulage of former Ballarat horse trams accommodated additional passengers during busy periods.



The rounded ends contrast to the straight lines of the central water tank on the track cleaner.



Trailers provide additional accommodation for crowds from the station. Single deck cars are former steam trailers, the smaller being an "umbrella" car.



The way to the railway station is illuminated by the Mitchell Street overhead arc lights.

Four additional trams were constructed and in service by 1904. They were of the same style as the original twelve, but slightly longer and three had three-window saloons. They became Nos. 13, 15 and 16, and are believed to have been converted from steam tram trailers Nos. 9 to 11. They were placed on long steel underframes, had their end platforms completely rebuilt and lengthened, and received electric car trucks and control equipment. No. 14 is believed to have been an open combination car with two-window saloon built new by Duncan & Fraser, but might have been converted from one of the steam tram trailers Nos. 14 to 16. A water sprinkler tram was ordered new from the British Electric Car Company and was commissioned in 1903. In September, 1905, five double deck horse trams were received from Ballarat (which system had been converted to electric trams by the same Company on 18th of the previous month). They immediately proved popular (probably because of their better passenger to weight ratio than the ex-steam trams) and continued in use on holiday and special loading periods until 11th November, 1925. They were scrapped the following year. The unconverted ex-steam tram trailers had been scrapped by about 1913.

Messrs. Duncan & Fraser built two new electric trams in 1913, which became Nos. 17 and 18. They were open cross bench cars on straight sills, fitted with motorman's weather shields. This protection probably formed the pattern for the rest of the electric car fleet which was so fitted during the following (approximately) ten years.



Passenger car No. 17 was later converted to the second track cleaner.



Above: One of the single track, open cross bench cars pauses at the fountain before proceeding to Eaglehawk. The tram departure time indicator board with four o'clock is just visible at the rear of the car.

Right: A kerbside electrical junction box carries the name of the parent company (The British Insulated Wire Co. Ltd., Preston, England), as well as that of The Electric Supply Company.



Day by Day . . .

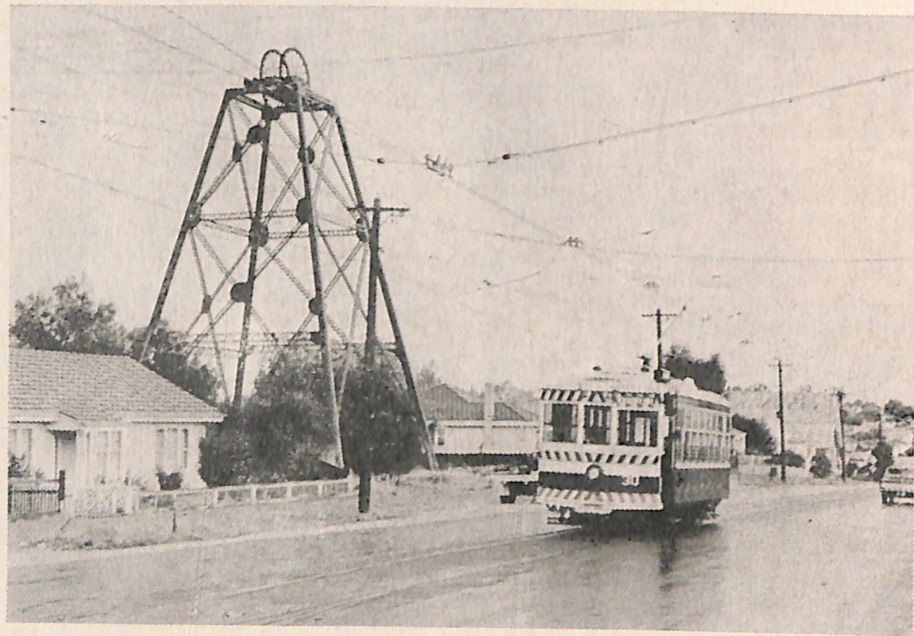
Although the service appears to have settled down quite well, the first serious accident to be reported took place at about 11.00 p.m. on Friday, 29th May, 1903, when two trams collided head-on at California Gully. The tram from Bendigo carried the theatre crowd and the motorman was subsequently dismissed for not waiting at the Needle loop. Both trams were damaged, the one ex-Bendigo rather badly. The other motorman was severely cautioned and reduced to a conductor for one month.

As an economy measure, the Company decided to convert the Lake Weeroona-Golden Square route to one-man operation in 1913, and trams Nos. 1, 5, 8, 9, 11 and 12 were suitably altered. The former transverse seats on the open end platforms were placed longitudinally facing inwards, and collapsible steel gates were fitted between the leading end of the seat and the front of the car. These vehicles became known as "Fare Box" cars.

The trailers proved very useful at times of heavy loading, such as the arrival of picnic trains from Melbourne or for local sporting events. Trams would meet the special trains at the railway station and work direct to Lake Weeroona via the facing crossover in Mitchell Street, wrong direction around the connecting curve into Pall Mall and through the

facing section of the compound crossover in Pall Mall. The shunting of trailers at Lake Weeroona, Quarry Hill and Golden Square termini, which were on virtually level track, was carried out by human muscle power, while gravity was used at Eaglehawk.

The Job's Gully passing loop was originally placed north of the railway bridge, which was its correct position when the single track extension to Darling Street was in use. However, as mining decreased, the service was cut back to just beyond the end of the double track at the Eaglehawk Town Hall, and the correct position for the loop was then on top of the railway bridge, in accordance with the new timetable. This proved both awkward and dangerous, and it was subsequently removed to its present site. The date of construction of the present steel bridge and its red-brick abutments is not known, but is probably in the late 1910's. The Company fitted power consumption meters to the trams a few months after the service commenced and daily figures were tabulated. Motormen were queried if too much current was consumed. The meters were removed in the early 1930's. For many years in the 1910's and 1920's, a stand at the Victoria Fountain, Charing Cross, carried four clocks which indicated the departure time of the next tram on each of the four routes.



Bendigo personified — mining and trams. Birney No. 30 at the Manchester loop on the Eaglehawk route.

CHAPTER 4

The S.E.C. Era

Acquisition

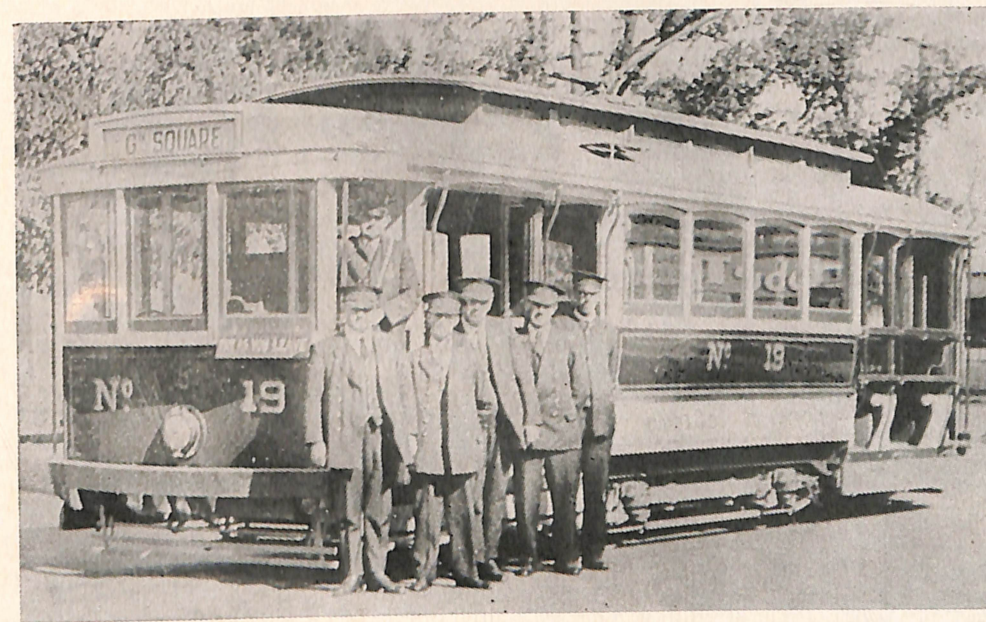
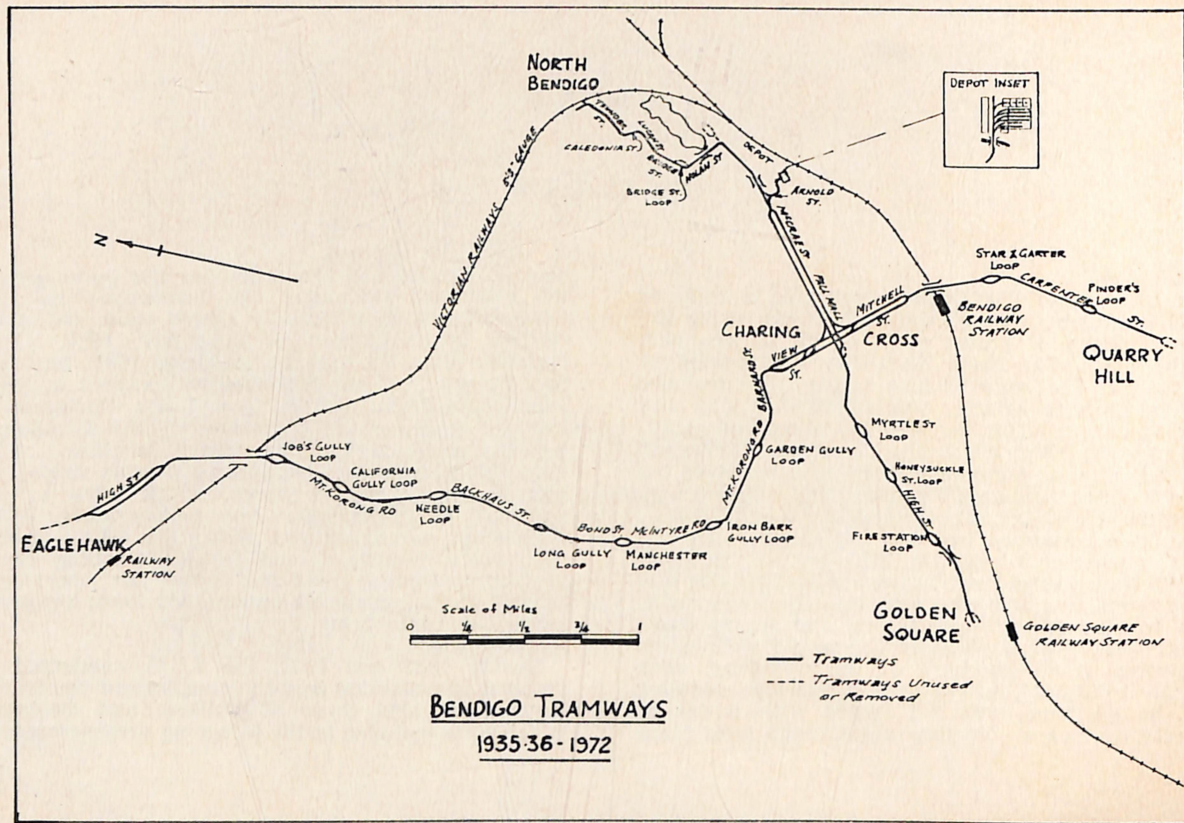
In 1918, State Parliament constituted a body to develop electricity production in Victoria, using the huge deposits of brown coal in the eastern part of the State. The State Electricity Commission of Victoria, as the body became known, also had the task of unifying existing sources of electricity and its distribution. This involved the plant and equipment of the Electric Supply Company of Victoria Limited, who, as previously mentioned, operated the Bendigo powerhouse and supplied the city with its commercial and domestic electricity.

Initial negotiations between the Commission and the Company took place in 1923, but as the Company's franchise did not expire until 1931, the rate of progress was limited. Although the Commission was an electricity manufacturing and supply body, it intimated that, if necessary, it would include the tramways in its purchase of the Company, even though it did not consider itself a tramway operator and, at the time, was not vested with power to operate tramways. Further negotiations took place

during 1928-29, and the terms for the purchase of the Company (including the tramways) by the Commission were eventually agreed upon, and duly ratified by Parliament in December, 1929. The purchase date was set at 1st July, 1931, but the date of expiry of the franchise was altered to 30th June, 1934. During this period the Commission was to supervise the operations of the Company, which was to continue its normal functions. The Commission was also required to provide funds for any necessary capital works, which were to be approved by Parliament. Also in December, 1929, Parliament passed an Act giving the S.E.C. power to operate tramways, and further detailing their protection from competitive motor bus operators. In due course, these aforementioned items progressively came into being.

Rehabilitation

During 1932 and 1933, the S.E.C. conducted a detailed investigation into the condition of the tramways (and also those at Ballarat and Geelong, which were included in the foregoing arrangements).



The first tram purchased from the Melbourne system. No. 19 (later No. 12) as converted for one-man operation.