

## Memories of MMTB Clothing Factory

On a recent trip to Melbourne I visited the Tram Museum – not so much to look at the trams, although I did find them fascinating, but to remember the building that had been the MMTB clothing factory.

In 1958-59 I was the office girl in the Clothing Factory. My name was Margaret Smith. The job was an interesting experience for me. I was not kept particularly busy, and was able to get out my Pitman's book and teach myself touch typing in my spare time. A very useful skill I still appreciate having. Also, I was studying at night, so it was good not to have a demanding day job.

The first manager of the factory during my time was Mr Purves. He had a heart attack not long after I'd begun there, and was replaced by a much younger man, Mr. Butterworth (?Keith). There were a dozen or more women in the machine room – it was all piece work, and everyone kept an eye on the rest to make sure they stopped sewing exactly on time for morning tea etc. There was one lady in a separate room who did the shirts. I can remember only one name from that time among the girls – Dorothy Watt (and I only remember her because the others used to tease her with 'Dorothy What?'). Two of the women had previously been conductresses. There were two men in the cutting room – one was Ken (or Kenny). I remember being fascinated watching them cutting through a dozen layers of serge with their machines.

Once a week the new tramway recruits would come in to be measured for their uniforms. At the same time, a couple of men from insurance companies would arrive and endeavour to sell them life insurance. There was always a bit of banter. After one such visit, one of the insurance salesmen poked his head into the office and passed on the information that two of the new recruits were not interested in insurance – they were policemen from the Northern Territory on leave, and decided being a tram conductor would be a good way to see Melbourne!

There was a full-time cleaning lady in the factory, who my memory pictures constantly propped up by a broom, cigarette dangling from her lips. Looking back, as she was always there before everyone else, I assume she cleaned the work rooms before the machinists arrived each day. I can't remember her name, but she made the tea (in a huge pot) for morning and afternoon tea.

The girls had to 'clock on' each morning. There were always a few who constantly ran late. They would rush up the front steps and grab the handle of the clocking on machine to sign their name, then pull it back for the next girl coming behind them. From time to time Head Office would send a memo saying it could not read some of the signatures and please could the ladies write more clearly.

Once a day 'Les' from South Melbourne depot would phone me with some numbers I needed. I had the greatest trouble understanding him on the phone, until I complained to Mr Butterworth, and he informed me that Les always held the phone under his chin. Thereafter I would interrupt Les to ask him to speak into the phone, each time he let it drop below his chin again. I felt a bit rude speaking to him the way I did, but it was the only way to get through to him and get the information I needed.

One of the best features of my job was the free Tram and Tramways Bus Pass. I travelled everywhere by tram or bus, rarely using the trains. It didn't matter that it took longer than riding in a train.

*Received from Margaret Wilmot by email – 25-2-2016*