

# Trammies

*A ride through Victoria's tramway culture*



21 February — 11 May 2003





Save our Trams rally, Bourke St Mall, 1990.

Melbourne's current tram network is vastly different to the single line that opened in 1885. In November that year Melbourne's first cable car began running along Flinders Street and Wellington Parade from the city to Richmond a few kilometres to the east. At this time 'Marvellous Melbourne' was an expanding and prosperous city with grand Victorian buildings and a busy business district.

With the opening of this one line, Melbourne in six short years, went on to develop the world's largest single-owner cable tram network. It was also the most technologically advanced cable network in the world with 17 lines covering almost 75 kilometres.

## From Cable to Electric

In 1889, a few years after the first cable car, an electric tram was pioneered from Box Hill to Doncaster in the outer east. It was unreliable, ran intermittently, and was finally abandoned seven years later.

In 1906 the North Melbourne Electric Tramways and Lighting Company built Melbourne's first electric tramway from Flemington Bridge to North Essendon and the Maribyrnong River. Impressed by this electric traction tram local councils began to construct new tramways beyond the areas previously served, beginning with the Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust in 1910.

In 1916 the cable tram system which had been run by the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company passed into government hands.

## The Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB)

In 1919 Melbourne was expanding rapidly and it became clear that the city's various council-run tramways would be better managed under a single entity.

### Council-run tram networks

PMTT	Prahran & Malvern Tramways Trust
HTT	Hawthorn Tramways Trust
MBCTT	Melbourne Brunswick & Coburg Tramways Trust
FNPTT	Fitzroy Northcote & Preston Tramways Trust
FITT	Footscray Tramways Trust

### The Trammie Family

The trammie family is an experience for many of us who put on the tram uniform. Our costume helps identify us to the public, while shiftwork has us out and about at odd times; early morning, late at night, and of course during the day.

Trammies meet with Melbourne's citizenry every day, as well as the many visitors to our city that jump on for a ride.

Trammies work at eight depots, Preston Workshops, Civil Branch and Overhead Electrical Department. They share the day's experiences and have the long standing tradition of socialising through tramway social clubs, inter-depot competitions, balls, picnics and barbecues.

This social tradition was encouraged in the days of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board who actively sought to develop and encourage a harmonious 'trammie family'.



Trammies gather around the pool table at the Malvern depot.

11 Nov 1885

First cable tram in Melbourne, Melbourne to Richmond

26 Dec 1887

Ballarat horse tramway opens

14 Oct 1889

First electric tramway in Australia, Box Hill to Doncaster

1 Feb 1892

Bendigo open first steam tramway

6 Jan 1896

Box Hill Tramway closes

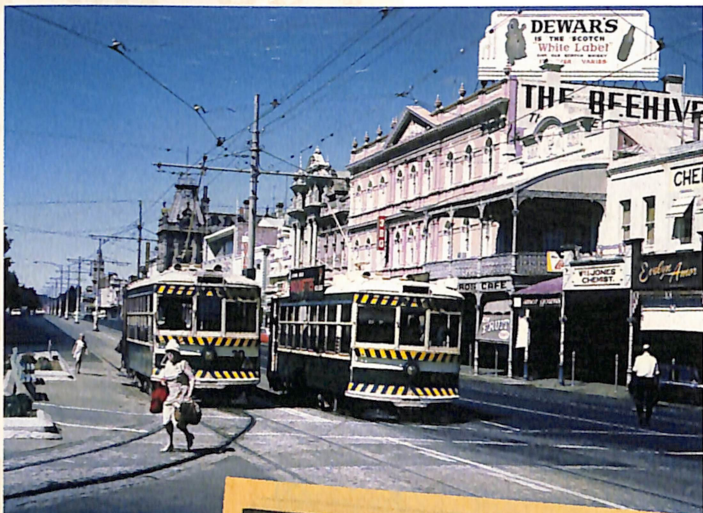
11 Oct 1906

Electric trams in Essendon area

16 Nov 1910

First municipal tram services start in Prahran and Malvern





Bendigo Birney trams at Charing Cross in January 1969, two years before services stopped.



Bendigo Advertiser, April 1972.

Bendigo tramways were purchased by an English electrical company during the 1900s which saw electric trams come to Bendigo in 1903, Ballarat in 1905 and Geelong in 1912.

The next major change was the acquisition of the privately-owned power companies by the government-run State Electricity Commission (SEC). In doing so the SEC acquired the Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo tram services between 1930 and 1934. The SEC rebuilt, though reluctantly, Ballarat's and Bendigo's systems, while Geelong's was still in good condition at the time.

One of the features of the three provincial tramways was the long periods of service that

trammies clocked-up. Robert Haines started in 1887 and retired in 1939 after 52 years. Another long serving trammie Dave Kellett recalled 'I loved the job...It was the people, the people were terrific'.

By the mid-1950s Geelong's system had become worn out. Despite strong local support for trams in Geelong, the SEC closed the system in 1956 sending its good trams to Ballarat

## Melbourne to Calcutta

### Extending the hand of tramway friendship

The Melbourne and Calcutta tram systems are two of the largest outside of Europe, that have been in continuous operation since their origins.

While Melbourne's trams are here to stay, Calcutta's tramcars and tracks are run down and in threat of closure in a city choked with smog and air pollution.

In October 1996 South Melbourne Depot trammie Roberto D'Andrea undertook a self-funded one month visit to Calcutta to support a system that was struggling to survive.

Dressed in a Melbourne connie's uniform and bag, Roberto was granted permission to work as a conductor and perform on four Calcutta tramcars whose interiors he'd decorated with photos and poetry about Melbourne and Calcutta tramway culture.

His Calcutta *tramjatra*, or tram journey, was well received by the Calcuttan public, tram management and union, and was covered in Calcutta's and Melbourne's print and television media.

With fellow tram enthusiasts Mike Douglas, Andy Miller, Malcom Just, and other connies, Roberto has established a friendship link with Calcutta's trammies which sees trammie festivals in both cities on roughly a two-year cycle.



Performing connie Roberto D'Andrea on his first day in Calcutta, October 1996.



2001 tramjatra festival and launch of the 'sunrise' tram 649. This tram (left) has been remodelled to look like a Melbourne Z class tram.



### Cable to electric

Swanston Street in 1925–6  
Flinders Street in 1927  
Collins Street in 1929  
Elizabeth Street 1935  
Bourke Street in 1940

That year the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) formed with the objective of turning all the various cable and electric tramway into one efficient system.

The program of turning cable trams to electric began in earnest in 1925 and took 15 years to complete with a hold up between 1927 and 1935 due largely to the austerity of the Great Depression.

In October 1940 the last of Melbourne's cable cars rolled down Bourke Street and into history.



W-class tram

## The Birth of the W-class Tram

On gaining control of the tramways the M&MTB had inherited a large number of varying types of trams. For the future expansion of the system a standard vehicle was needed. So was born the famous W-class tram.

The W-class proved to be the sturdiest, most popular, and recognisable of all Melbourne's trams. More than 750 were built over the next 34 years, most in Melbourne's own Preston Workshops. Today W-class trams still run in Melbourne and there are W-class trams running in San Francisco, Seattle and Christchurch.

## Women Get on Board

Until 1941 Victoria's trams had been driven entirely by men. Even all the conductors were men.

But the Second World War changed things dramatically. With so many men contributing to the country's war effort, and manpower being diverted to fill shortages in other industries, women for the first time were invited to join the tramways as 'conductresses'. But only women whose husbands were tram workers who were now in military service were employed.

Remarkably these 'conductresses' were employed under the same wages and conditions as men. During the war years women held the tramways together, establishing themselves as the equal of their male counterparts.

As the war finished and men returned, the women trammies were retrenched *en masse* in expectation that men would return to the trams. Within three months Melbourne was again suffering a shortage of workers and began to employ women again.

It wasn't until 5 December 1975 that the tramways had their first female driver, Joyce Barry (cap No 4074). It was at this time that women started taking up positions throughout the Tramways Board.

Women trammies, as Joyce Barry would say, ran "a good tight ship".



The *Tramway Record* magazine, late 1970s.

14 March 1912

1 Nov 1919

13 Apr 1924

26 Dec 1925

26 Oct 1940

1 Oct 1949

26 Jun 1955

25 Mar 1956

Geelong Electric Tramways opens

Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board forms

First electric trams in Melbourne CBD

Swanston Street begins first major conversion of cable to electric

Last cable tram runs in Melbourne

Major General Robert Risson joins the M&MTB as chairman

Bourke Street lines open replacing bus services

Geelong Electric Tramways closes





Sir Robert Risson

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**In 1950 the following Australian cities had tramway services:**  
Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Bendigo, Ballarat, Fremantle, Geelong, Kalgoorlie, Launceston and Newcastle.

## A Rocky Ride – Saving the City's Trams

While thirteen Australian cities had trams systems in 1950, today only Melbourne's system survives. The 1950s and 1960s saw Melbourne's trams vulnerable to the closure that affected many Australian cities as well as Britain and the U.S. The car was in ascendancy and with it came a downturn in tram use and a trend to great road building programs.

Perhaps the tramways' greatest defender was Major General Sir Robert Risson. Risson was M&MTB Chairman from 1949 to 1970. Risson understood the greater efficiency, economy and cleanliness of trams compared to buses and cars, and was a tireless advocate for their retention. His energy and commitment over two decades ensured sufficient funds to maintain trams and tracks paving the way for a new fleet of trams built in the 1970s.

Today Melbourne's tramways include W-class, Z-class, A-class and B-class trams as well as the most recent C-class, Citidas and Combino. Our tram system is run jointly through public-private partnership between state government and the private company Yarra Trams.

## Victoria's Provincial Tramways

Trams came to the gold city of Ballarat on Boxing Day 1887, just two years after Melbourne. They were double-decker tramcars drawn by horses and manned by a driver and conductor. In 1890 Bendigo followed with battery operated trams that lasted only three months. They finally got their own fulltime service of steam-powered trams in 1892.

However electric tramways and private power companies were natural companions around the turn of last century. The operators of both Ballarat and

### Continuing the Journey Cultural diversity on the trams

For decades newly arrived immigrants have found work on the trams.

The diversity of nationalities that make up the trammie workforce is a clear illustration of Australia's cultural diversity.

From the late 1880s until the end of the Second World War trammies were largely of British or Irish descent.

By the late 1940s things had begun to change. Post-war immigration meant that the trams were often the first job for many new arrivals from Greece, Italy, Egypt and many other European countries.

By the 1970s and 80s the ethnic diversity of trammies became broader still with immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, Latin America, Mauritius and New Zealand joining those from Britain and Europe.

Today most nationalities are represented in Melbourne's trammie workforce.



Ballarat bogie tramcar, Ballarat, November 1962.



(l-r) Tim (Timboon), Sovann (Cambodia), Amy (Malaysia) and Mohan (Sri Lanka).

30 Jun 1970

Major General Robert Risson formally retires

19 Sep 1971

Ballarat tramways closes

16 April 1972

Bendigo tramways closes

1 July 1983

M&MTB becomes Metropolitan Transport Authority

29 Apr 1994

City Circle free service introduced

28 May 1998

Last of the Connies finishes on No 16 tram route, St Kilda Beach

1 Sep 1998

Victorian Government franchises out the tram services to Yarra Trams and Swanston Trams





and Bendigo. Both cities soldiered on against falling patronage, increased car use, rising costs, and deteriorating trams and track. The writing was on the wall.

Ballarat's tram service closed in 1971 and Bendigo followed in 1972. However all was not lost. Bendigo began running their tourist 'Talking Tram' in 1972 between North Bendigo and the Central Deborah Mine. Ballarat saw the formation of an all-volunteer tram enthusiasts group who began operating a small section of line within the Botanic Gardens.

Today tramway museums in Ballarat, Bendigo, Malvern, Bylands and Haddon work to preserve Victoria's tramways heritage.

## Gunzels

### Melbourne's tram enthusiasts

'Gunzel' is a popular local term that describes that species of person who is a proud tram enthusiast.

Gunzels have typically acquired immense knowledge about tram history, culture and trivia.

While some gunzels will collect tram memorabilia such as tickets, timetables or model trams, others can tell you when each new model tram was commissioned and can detail their design features.

Some gunzels have memorised which overseas cities have trams, the tramcars used, what type of track they roll on, and whether they run on AC or DC electricity. Others will take their holidays in tram cities where they can ride the local versions.

A gunzel may know every tramcar by its own unique number and speak of it almost as a friend; '774 rounds the curve near the War Memorial' or 'here comes 1040 pulling in at the terminus at East Coburg'.

A gunzel might be an armchair enthusiast, a collector or a tram restorer.

One thing is for sure, gunzels have been largely responsible for keeping trammie culture alive. We thank those gunzels who have helped preserve the tramway histories of Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong.



Proud tram enthusiasts at the Ballarat Tramway Museum in front of a 1914 maximum traction bogie tramcar, 1998.



Malvern Tramways Museum

Cover: Gunzels (l-r) Don, Malcolm, Darren and Roberto dressed in a variety of Melbourne and country tram uniforms.

Photo courtesy of Mike Costello.



ARTS FOR HEALTH

The *Trammies* exhibition is presented as part of the VicHealth Arts for Health Program. Through this partnership healthy environments are created and access to arts activities is facilitated.

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