

A
STORY
OF
THE MELBOURNE CABLE TRAMWAY SYSTEM

11TH NOVEMBER, 1885 TO 26TH OCTOBER, 1940

C.H. GOVETT

A.E. TWENTYMAN

PRESENTED TO...
CITY OF RICHMOND.
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
CENTENARY OF THE
CABLE TRAM LINK
RICHMOND - SPENCER ST.
OPENED 11 NOV 1885.

[Signature]
ALBERT
N. GOVETT.

*Gifted Alb. Twentyman, 11/10/85.
As a centenary of my husband.*

I DEDICATE THIS STORY TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER, CLEMENT HENRY GOVETT
(SON OF GEORGE GOVETT, J.P. COLONIST)
WHO DEVELOPED THE KEEN INTEREST I HAD
IN THE CABLE SYSTEM AND WITH WHOM I
TRAVELLED SO MANY, MANY MILES ON DUMMY AND CAR.

TO
MY FRIEND
JOHN.
WITH BEST WISHES.

[Handwritten signature]

NEVILLE GOVETT

28 APR 86.

FOREWORD

The cable trams of Melbourne had always fascinated me and I longed to make a record of the system. As I was only nine years of age when the first line was converted to electric traction, it will be appreciated that I had not made a start on such a story but I did, encouraged by my dad, take a mental note of the activities at the time.

Later, I took a few snapshots with my old Box Brownie camera and then in 1934, having acquired a 16mm movie camera, started to record some movie shots. In 1938 and early 1939, realising that the system was to be completely replaced, I decided to make a more detailed film record of the workings and with great co-operation of members of the Nicholson Street Engine House staff, I filmed scenes of underground workings, the powerful engines and cable operation. This, added to many other scenes I recorded, enabled me to make a fairly complete film record, and to-day is, I understand, the only movie pictorial story of one of the great engineering feats in tramway history. The MMTB, which has a copy of the film, makes it available to organizations throughout Australia, and I am happy to say it is enjoyed by many.

In addition to this film and the records contained in this book, an extensive pictorial record has been made and all these, I truly believe, will give a permanent record of the Melbourne Cable Tramway System for all time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MR A.E. TWENTYMAN, NORTHCOTE, VICTORIA

For personal knowledge, records and
assistance in addition to the
encouragement he gave me in
compiling this record.

THE MITCHELL LIBRARY

THE LATROBE LIBRARY

OXLEY MEMORIAL LIBRARY

STATE LIBRARIES OF VICTORIA AND NEW SOUTH WALES

For newspaper reports

THE MELBOURNE AND METROPOLITAN TRAMWAYS BOARD

THE TRAMWAYS SOCIETY MUSEUM OF VICTORIA

For pictures and information

LEILA, MY WIFE

For hours of research
at New South Wales Public Library

SHIRLEY FALLOWS (MRS) MT GRAVATT, QUEENSLAND

For typing this record

SO MANY OTHERS IN PASSING

BRISBANE

26TH MARCH, 1973

GLOSSARY

Over the years of cable tramway operation many terms were expressed by crews and passengers which differed slightly from the correct nomenclature. A few are given below:

TRAIN - Commonly referred to as a TRAM. This was the dummy and trailer set linked (the dummy being the grip car and trailer the enclosed car attached). Early documents always referred to a TRAIN and occasionally a notice appeared on Richmond trams stating "This TRAIN runs between "A" & "B" only".

GRIP - The mechanism attached to the dummy which opened and closed upon the ever moving cable as required (on occasions it was called "gripper").

THROW - The operation of opening the grip and releasing the cable.

COLLECT or PICK-UP (the cable) - The action of the cable being inserted in the grip either by automatic or hand operation.

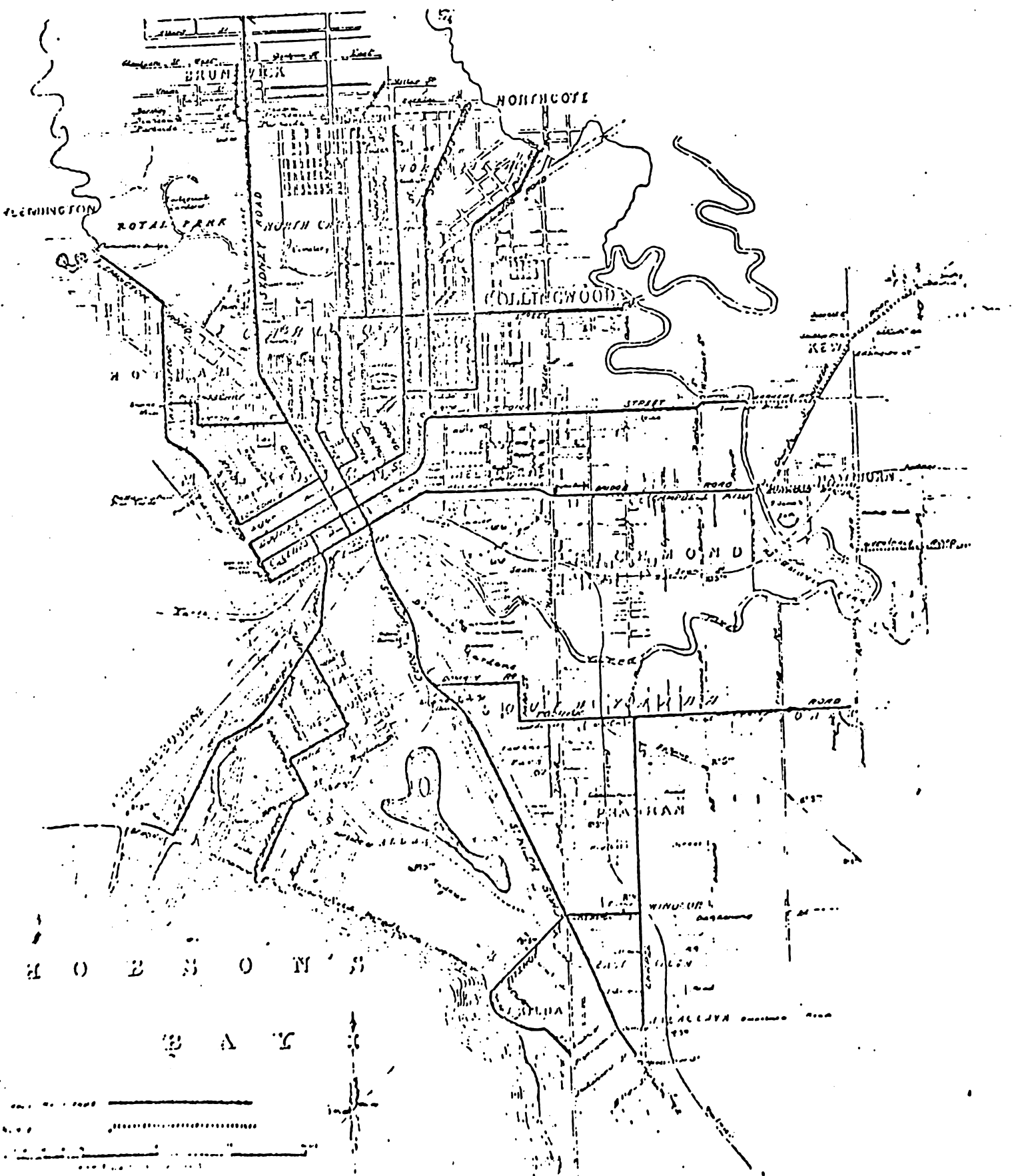
ROPE - The cable.

DRUM - Used to collect cable by hand operation. It consisted of a pulley attached to an arm (underground) which, when pulled by a wire rope attached to the arm lifted the cable into the grip.

Americans called the 'drum' the GIPSY.

FLYING SHUNT - Shunting operation carried out whilst passengers were still aboard. (This did not occur regularly).

CITY OF MELBOURNE TRAMWAY SYSTEM.



THE MELBOURNE CABLE TRAMWAY SYSTEM

After a lapse of over eighty-six years it is difficult to gauge what impact the introduction of cable trams to Melbourne had on the travelling public. Up to that time, apart from the limited suburban railway, public transport consisted of a few horse drawn omnibuses and some hackney cabs. The cable tram system which was established in the remarkably short time of five-six years must have been a tremendous advance even for those boom years.

It is quite possible that the opening of the first lines attracted little attention, for the public, unaccustomed to good public transport, did not appreciate the excellence of the service that the cable system was about to provide.

The Melbourne Omnibus Company founded in 1869 had, for some years, been trying to obtain permission to install tramways. Eventually, in October, 1884, the Tramways Act was passed. The Melbourne Tramway Trust, which was formed by representatives from the twelve municipal councils concerned, was authorised to build the tracks, engine houses and to install the machinery and ropes. The Company which had changed its name to - The Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company - was responsible for the construction of the cars and dummies and the sheds to house the vehicles and was given a lease of the whole undertaking to expire 30 June, 1916.

The Trust engaged the services of Messrs Duncanson and Clapp and sent them to America to inspect the cable installations in San Francisco, Chicago and other cities. These gentlemen returned with a knowledge of the best and modern ideas and as a consequence, Melbourne became possessed of what was possibly the best of all the cable systems.

It was not long, apparently, before the people of Melbourne adjusted their habits to take advantage of the service provided, and the cable tram became an integral part of the city and suburbs.

There must have been some fascination at the sight of the stately procession of the lightly but well constructed cars, resplendent in bright paint and varnish, following each other along grooved rails drawn by the mysterious mechanism of the grip on an almost obscure wire rope over crossings and directed by points.

The fact that they ran for approximately fifty years without any serious modification speaks well for the design and thoroughness of the workmanship.

The Richmond line was opened for passengers on 11 November, 1885. Twenty sets of cars and dummies had been imported from America, as well as a number of supervisors and men experienced in the handling of cable cars. For a while the horse omnibuses were kept running and the few cable trams in commission were kept down to the speed of the omnibuses, namely, six miles per hour. In a few weeks the whole fleet of trams replaced the buses and the speed of the rope gradually increased.

The route through Bridge Road, Wellington Parade, Flinders Street into Spencer Street had but one right angled curve at the corner of Spencer and Flinders Streets. The grades were easy, and these factors reflected in the wear of the rope; it lasted much longer than most of the others.