



# The Bellcord

Journal of the Friends of Hawthorn Tram Depot



From left to right, Driver Alan Dacey, Conductress Dot Rango and Depot Starter Ben Opie at East Preston Depot in late 1964. This photograph shows the three main styles of M&MTB uniforms of the early 1960s. The male traffic staff uniform for drivers and conductors was made from blue serge, while the conductress' uniform was brown.

Senior traffic staff such as inspectors and starters were known as 'braids', due to the additional braid on their caps, while their uniforms were dark green. Note the vest and double-breasted jacket worn by Ben Opie, in contrast to the single breasted jackets worn by Alan Dacey and Dot Rango. Official M&MTB Photograph.

## In This Issue

In This Issue

1

Tailor Made

2

When Did It Close?

3

Library

3

Open House Melbourne

4

Recent Donations

4

Grate Work

4



*The workroom of the clothing factory at Hawthorn Depot. Note the unmistakable arched windows looking out to Wallen Road. The foreman of the factory - E. Neville - is standing behind the machinists. Official M&MTB photo.*

### Tailor Made

The Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board ran our trams from 1919 to 1983. Although it was a government authority, it had a strong corporate identity and image. Even today, there are many reminders of its existence – the initials M&MTB still appear on buildings, manhole covers and roadside furniture.

A strong part of its corporate image was the appearance of its employees. From its founding, the drivers, conductors and inspectors of the M&MTB were outfitted in uniforms of a quasi-military style. The wearing of uniforms underlined the authority of its staff over the travelling public, engendering a sense of respect and obedience derived directly from the Board's role as a State Government body. Quality uniforms also added to employee morale, engendering a deep sense of ownership and commitment of the staff to the Board.

However, in the early days of World War II the M&MTB was facing a minor crisis. The previous supplier of uniforms – the Commonwealth Clothing Factory – had ceased making its uniforms in 1938. Alternate commercial suppliers were unsatisfactory, both with respect to clothing quality and promptness

of supply. The scarcity inherent in a wartime economy only made the uniform situation worse, as most clothing manufacturers were focused towards military contracts rather than meeting the relatively small volumes required by the M&MTB.

The consolidation of staff into the new head office building in September 1937 left the M&MTB with a number of vacant buildings. Many of these properties were sold, but the former Hawthorn Tramways Trust offices could not, as they were incorporated into the fabric of the Hawthorn Depot building which was still used as a running tram depot.

In 1940, the M&MTB took the decision to establish its own clothing factory, operating out of the unoccupied offices at Hawthorn Depot, opening on 20 May. Only a little over a year later it made the uniforms for the first Melbourne conductresses. Many favourable comments were made by the contemporary press regarding the stylish appearance of their uniforms.

In its early years, the clothing factory didn't just make tramway uniforms. It also produced uniforms for the police, Victorian Railways and the Federal Attorney-General's department. Shirts, overcoats,



**Open Days - 2014**

22 March	12 April	26 April
10 May	24 May	14 June
28 June	12 July	26 July
9 August	23 August	13 September
27 September	11 October	25 October
8 November	22 November	13 December

Hawthorn Depot is open on the second and fourth Saturdays from January to November, and the second Saturday of December.

Opening hours are 11am–5pm.

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trousers and skirts were all produced at Hawthorn Depot, ensuring that the traffic staff of the Board had a neat and impressive appearance.

For more than four decades the clothing factory fulfilled the uniform requirements of Melbourne's tramway system, making thousands of garments each year. One of the enduring traditions for trainee conductors was the trip out to Hawthorn Depot to be fitted with a brand new tailored uniform.

It was only with the corporatisation of Melbourne's public transport system that the clothing factory became uncompetitive. Like many other parts of the formerly vertically integrated tramway operator, uniform manufacture was contracted out, and the factory was closed, ending a small part of Melbourne's tram history.

The space used by the clothing factory is now occupied by up-market residential apartments, converted during the redevelopment of Hawthorn Depot in 2002.

**When Did It Close?**

One of the frequent questions we hear at the museum is 'when did the Hawthorn clothing factory close?'

While we know the exact date it opened, there is nothing on when the clothing factory actually ceased operation. Our keen researchers have searched high and low, and have come up with nothing other than it had been closed for some time before 1992, but nothing as to the date it actually closed. As this is well within living memory, we are hoping that one of our readers has possession of this elusive scrap of information.

We do know the factory was still running in 1983, and that after clothing manufacture ceased it was still used as the uniform store.

If you worked or know of anyone who worked in the factory, we would also like to hear from you. We desperately need more information to complete a display in the museum on the clothing factory, and to add an article to our website.

Please help us!

**Library**

The recent acquisition of the Peter Watson Duckett Collection has required some changes at the museum. The two offices behind the kitchen have been converted into the library for the collection. The available library space has been expanded by enclosing a section of the adjacent hallway.

Shelving has been purchased to house collection material currently stored in archive boxes. We are looking forward to unpacking the boxes to see what they contain.

The compactus room adjacent to the driver training room has also been reorganised, and additional shelving erected. This will be used to house collection materials not suitable for library access.

Activity at the moment is focused on validating the collection catalogue, although we have already



*M&MTB clothing sampler, showing the three types of material used in the sixties, as per the front page photo, together with lapel badges and buttons. The inspector's badge with white lettering is only for staff authorised to man signal boxes at Franklin Street and St Kilda Junction. Sampler and photo from the collection of Mal Rowe.*

started to use some of the publications in researching articles for the website and developing interpretive materials for the museum.

It is a constant problem to not be distracted into browsing the volumes for fun.

### Open House Melbourne

After the great success of last year's Open House weekend, where over thirteen hundred people visited the museum, we have nominated again to be part of the Open House Melbourne program.

Keep your diaries free for the weekend of 26-27 July, as we will be looking for volunteers for guides for both days. The next issue of 'The Bellcord' will have more information on volunteering.

If you wish to let us know of your availability now, send an e-mail to [info@hawthorntramdepot.org.au](mailto:info@hawthorntramdepot.org.au).

### Recent Donations

The Australian Electric Transit Association has been clearing its holdings, and has donated a very large number of publications and original materials dating over many decades to FOHTD. We thank and acknowledge their generosity.

Cataloguing this massive amount of material will keep FOHTD archivist Warren Doubleday very busy.

Well-known enthusiast Bob Wilson has donated a partial Footscray destination roll to the museum. This very rare item will be suitably framed and mounted for prominent display.

### Grate Work

Kevin Taig has completed the thankless task of reinforcing and adjusting the grates covering the servicing pits in the tram barn. This unglamorous work is vital for ensuring our visitors have a safe and enjoyable museum experience.

On a related note, members may be surprised by the frequency that visitors drop belongings into the pits. Our staff readily leap into action to remove the grates and hop down into the depths to retrieve these lost treasures. However, the first time the editor obliged in this task, he found that the pit was a little too deep to get out by himself, not being quite as young as he used to be, and had to be rescued through the medium of a step-ladder.

Items recovered for our visitors have varied from a myki card, to car keys and a small digital camera.