

The Bellcord



W2 219 at Camberwell Depot after refurbishment (27 March 1964). Built as a W class in 1923, it was converted to W2 format during October 1930. This car has the distinction of being the first tram designed and built by the M&MTB, although the Board did construct a number of cable and single truck electric trams of previous designs before building W 219. The prolific W series trams became the public face of the M&MTB and Melbourne. (see photo on page 4)

Photo: Dale Budd

Birth of a Tramways Titan

November this year marks the centenary of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB). As the dominant provider of street-based public transport in Melbourne from 1919 until 1983, the Board's challenges and achievements are documented in many publications, including our museum's online articles.

The factors which influenced its founding legislation are an interesting story.

Continued on pages 2 to 6

Centenary of Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board



1919 - 1983

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the number of tramway operators in Melbourne was increasing. The comprehensive 1910-11 Royal Commission into Melbourne's railways and tramways proposed a plan for the future.

Municipal Tramways Trust

The Commission recommended that "the whole of the Metropolitan Tramway systems (privately and publicly owned) at the earliest possible date be vested in and operated by a Municipal Tramways Trust. [This would consist of] twelve members, nine to be elected directly by the ratepayers, two appointed by the Government, and a paid chairman appointed by the Trust, who shall devote his whole time to the duties of his office." (page 41)

It had been intended to include the two Victorian Railways tramways in the new entity – a proposal made as early as 1911. However years later in December 1918 an amendment to the relevant legislation to give effect to this failed in the Legislative Council.

Following the Commission's report Victoria experienced political instability with frequent changes of Premier and the uncertainties of war. There was no serious attempt to implement the recommendations.

With the lucrative Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company (MTOC) lease expiring in June 1916, a serious financial dispute arose between local municipalities and the State Government which significantly influenced the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Act 1918. (See *Money Money Money* on pages 5 and 6.)

Eventually a new Premier, Harry Lawson, tried to resolve these matters. On 5 July 1918 Lawson and the Commissioner for Public Works, Arthur Robinson, issued a statement printed in several newspapers. It set out in great detail a mechanism for distributing the disputed cable tram surplus and a proposed structure for the new municipal tramways trust.

Much of their proposal was based on the recommendations of the pre-war Royal Commission, although board membership was increased from 12

to 15 ratepayer elected members, plus one appointed by the government.

Nominee Board

This detailed statement did not quell the debate, but a resolution was on the horizon. With the signing of the Armistice and Christmas approaching, MPs of both houses participated in a joint-house 'free conference' to seek consensus on tramway matters.

On 19 December 1918, Premier Lawson stood in the Legislative Assembly to summarise the debate and announce an outcome. "This House suggested the direct election of the Board by the ratepayers, on the franchise of one ratepayer one vote. The other House suggested a kind of college of councils of the respective districts, which would elect the board.

"... We were unable to arrive at an agreement in regard either to the proposal submitted by another place or that suggested by the Assembly ... Finally, a majority of the managers for this House suggested that both those methods should be vetoed and that a nominee Board of seven members should be appointed by the Governor in Council." (*Victorian Hansard*, page 3364)

A number of other provisions were also debated – but within days the 109-page Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Act 1918 was passed.

Board Members

Announcement of the names of the newly appointed board members was delayed until the drawn out litigation between MTOC and the interim Tramway Board was finalised. On 24 June 1919 newspapers carried the names of the seven appointees. (They were all men as was the practice a century ago.)



Alexander Cameron (1864-1940), a solicitor, Malvern councillor and chairman of the Prahran & Malvern Tramways Trust (PMTT). Cameron was appointed chairman of the new Board on a full-time, permanent basis with an initial annual salary of £1,500. He held

this position until the end of 1935. Many details of this experienced tramway advocate and manager can be found in other publications.

While Cameron was a full-time appointment, his six fellow members were appointed on a sessional basis for three year terms at £2/2/- per sitting to a maximum annual payment of £120. They were:



Hector Hercules Bell (1876-1964), a rural worker and blacksmith who became a Richmond councillor, local representative on the Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works and deputy chairman of the Hawthorn Tramways Trust. Bell was the only board member with Labor Party affiliation. He would eventually succeed Cameron as M&MTB chairman from 1935.



William Whyte Cabena (1853-1928), manager then chairman of a shoe and leather company who became a Melbourne councillor, Lord Mayor and an influential business representative on government boards. Cabena was known to be determined and outspoken.



James George Membrey (1862-1940), a real estate agent, accountant and member of state parliament (1907-17). Membrey was a member of the 1910-11 Royal Commission then chairman of state's War Council, Infectious Diseases Hospital and Traffic Board.



Thomas O'Loghlen Reynolds (d 1931), a Coburg councillor, mayor and sole chairman of the Melbourne, Brunswick & Coburg Tramways Trust (1914-20). Reynolds became the deputy chairman of the Board.



Colin B Templeton (1862-1940), a bank manager, accountant and chairman of Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company and other firms. He was a board member of the Electric Supply Company of Victoria (ESCo) that ran the

Ballarat and Bendigo tramways. He was also the chairman of the outgoing 1916-19 Tramway Board.



Ernest Horatio Willis (1867-1947), an architect and political organiser with National Party affiliation who became a Prahran councillor then mayor. Willis had a long municipal career with the Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works and Alfred Hospital and was awarded the OBE. He had a working relationship with Cameron on the PMTT.

Board membership remained stable until the deaths of William Cabena in 1928 and Thomas Reynolds in 1931. Cameron, Membrey, Templeton and Willis retired in December 1935. Hector Bell remained a Board member for 30 years becoming the second Chairman from December 1935 until 1949.

Reactions

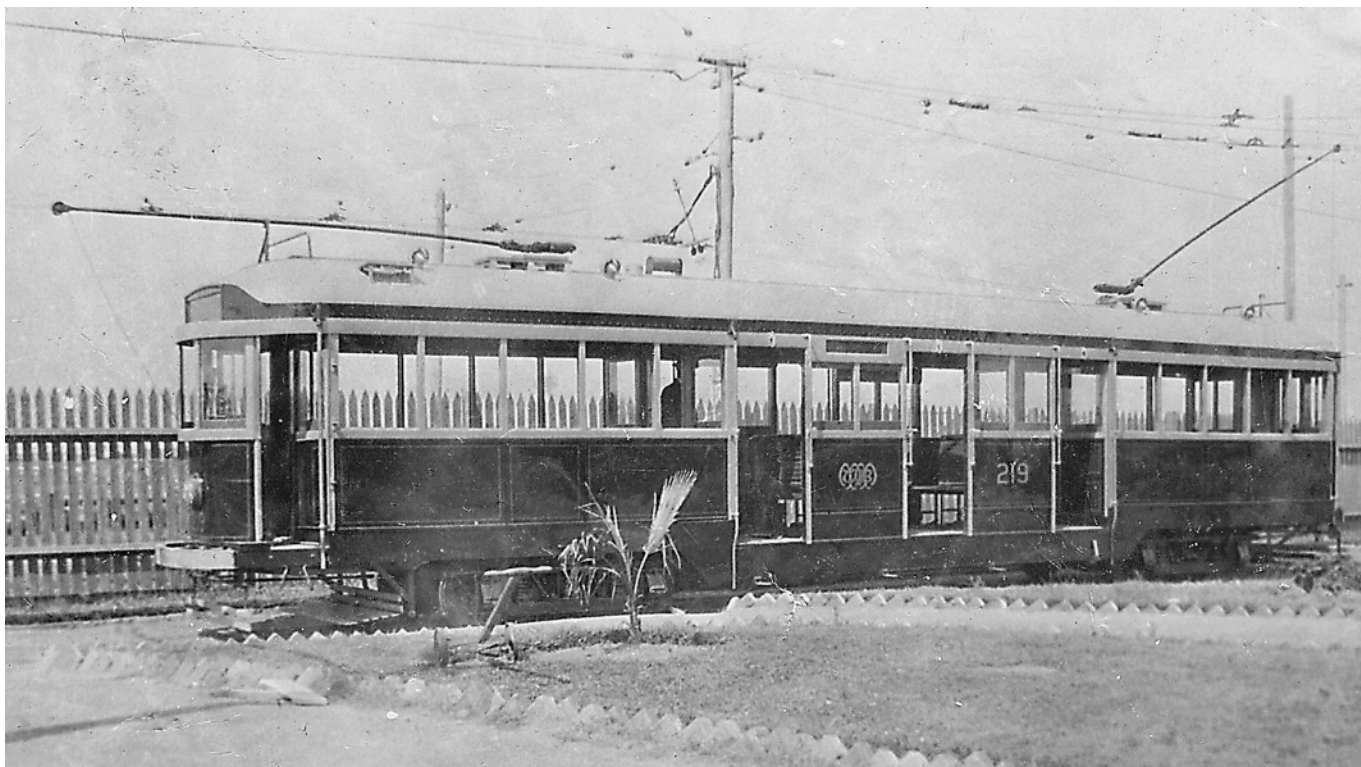
Public response to these appointments was mixed. Several major newspapers carried positive and similarly worded statements that "the Ministry had suffered an embarrassment of riches, there being such a wealth of material available to select from. It was impossible to offer positions on the board to all who had the requisite qualifications." (*The Age*, 25 June 1919)

The *Prahran Telegraph* (28 June 1919) was more extravagant in its praise because Cameron was a local identity:

"It is freely acknowledged that there is no expert in Australia in the running of electric tramways so competent as Mr Cameron ... There was no one in sight with half the brains of Mr Cameron ... He is a giant standing among pigmies."

There was also criticism. The Labor Party and tramway employee union had asked the government to include employee representatives as was done in other parts of the world dealing with large industrial concerns. Hector Bell was the only Labor member.

Fitzroy councillor Alexander Renfrew who had served for three years on the interim Tramway Board was disappointed that his developed expertise had been discarded.



W 219 nearing completion at the Holden St Workshop in 1923 Photo: M&MTB

About this photo

This damaged print depicts W 219 as constructed at the M&MTB Workshop in Holden St, North Fitzroy. Designed by Chief Engineer Tom Strickland, the car was delivered in the Board's first livery of brown and cream with an early version of the M&MTB monogram on its side panels. The original design of the drop-centre included evenly spaced doorways and face to back pairs of seats. It also featured longer trolley poles taken from single truck trams, a closed arch roof with torpedo ventilators and no route number boxes. It appears that the saloon windows are still to be fitted.

W 219 entered service in December 1923 and was one of 18 early W class trams assigned to Essendon Depot to replace single-truck trams towing trailers. This was necessary after a crowded tram and trailer ran out of control in Mt Alexander Rd. Converted to W2 219 in October 1930, this car was scrapped after a rear-on collision in 1978.

In its 63 years the M&MTB ordered the construction of over 1,000 tramcars. The first were replacement cable car sets and single-truck Q and R class electric trams. The last were what became known as the A1 class and B1 class trams that were delivered to the Board's successor, the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

The Member for Essendon, Thomas Ryan MLA, was critical that his constituency served by a private tramway operator was not represented.

November 1919

After two preliminary meetings to arrange senior staff and other matters, on Saturday 1 November 1919 the new Board formally convened to commence the development of Melbourne's street-based public transport. A century later trams remain an integral part of Melbourne's transport system.

My thanks to Dale Budd, Warren Doubleday, Robert Green, Mal Rowe, Brian Weedon and Randall Wilson for their assistance.

Geoff Brown

References:

- Cross, Budd & Wilson, Destination City 5th ed (1993)*
- Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into and Report upon the Railway and Tramway Systems of Melbourne and Suburbs (1911)*
- Victorian Hansard, Vol 151, November–December 1918*

Money, Money, Money

During the 1914-18 war, the State Government was in financial difficulty having trouble rolling over a £4 million loan on favourable terms. Its bankers intimated that if it paid off a quarter of the loan, this difficulty would disappear. The only problem was that the Government didn't have the cash readily available.

To resolve this issue, the State Government announced its intention to legislate to seize the cable tram surplus created by the winding up of the operating lease. In 1919 this surplus amounted to £866,320.

However this was money that twelve city councils were entitled to. While the cable trams themselves were owned by the Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company (MTOC), most of the infrastructure was the property of the Melbourne Tramways Trust – a municipal trust of the various city councils that had underwritten the construction of the cable tram system. Under the terms of the original legislation, any surplus remaining at the end of the MTOC lease would become the councils' property.

MTOC takeover

When the MTOC operating lease of the cable tram system expired on 30 June 1916, the State Government had no desire for the lease to be extended. As the cable trams had to be kept running, it created an interim Tramway Board (1916-1919) to take control of the assets and run the system, at least until after the war ended. It restricted its activities to operating the cable trams, and building new trams to cater for rapidly increasing passenger traffic on the existing routes.

The Tramway Board was focused on ensuring MTOC had met the condition of the operating lease to keep the system in good order. The Board stated that MTOC had not, and lodged a major financial claim. MTOC retaliated by lodging a counter-claim alleging inadequate compensation for transfer of its assets, which by mutual agreement was to be settled first.

A bitter and very lengthy campaign of litigation ensued, firstly through arbitration, the result of which neither party accepted. The case proceeded through a series of courts, until it reached the Privy



Tramway Board monogram at Clifton Hill (2011)

Photo: Mal Rowe

Council in England, then the highest court of appeal. Its decision was to award the sum of £355,000 to MTOC, which was the originally arbitrated amount.

The Tramway Board's claim then went to arbitration, which was settled by MTOC paying compensation of £115,000 to fix maintenance shortfalls. MTOC was finally wound up on 30 June 1919, having provided a very lucrative return for its long-term investors, including the founder, F.B. Clapp.

M&MTB legislation

When the State Government announced their intention to take the cable tram surplus, the city councils protested vigorously. They were assured by the Government their concerns would be addressed once the final legislation for a single tramway operator was passed by Parliament. The Solicitor-General, Arthur Robinson MLC, offered them compensation in the form of a write down of council debentures due in 1936. He also told them if they did not accept the offer, the councils would get nothing in compensation.

During the first year of its operations, the M&MTB transferred an unscheduled sum of £230,807 to State Treasury. It also distributed a one-off gratuity of £30,000 to the city councils it operated in, and relieved a debt of £4,841 of the Prahran and Malvern councils to the Victorian Railways, for their part in railway regrading works between Caulfield and South Yarra.

The Act also needed to address the opposition of some members of Parliament who were not in

favour of a tramway monopoly in Melbourne, even one under the control of the State Government. To gain their support, the Government made the M&MTB responsible for funding a proportion of the operations of three statutory bodies – the Liquor Licensing Fund, the Fire Brigades Board and the Infectious Diseases Hospital – all on an ongoing annual basis.

When the city councils then objected to the M&MTB having to fund the three statutory bodies, they were advised by Robinson that they would have these charges levied against them annually if they tried to obstruct the Government’s action. Their opposition folded under this duress.

Sir Arthur Robinson

Arthur Robinson (1872-1945) was a key figure in drafting the M&MTB legislation. He was Solicitor-General of Victoria (1918-24), Commissioner for Public Works (1918-1919) and Victorian Attorney-General (1919-1924). Sir Arthur received his knighthood in 1922.

Robinson attended the Board’s first meeting on 1 November 1919. In a widely reported quote from that meeting, he stated that “although the Act was probably not perfect, its main principles were sound and the Government had been successful in reconciling the many diverse tramway interests.” (*The Argus*, 3 November 1919)



Arthur Robinson

In hindsight, while the Act imposed a number of financial obligations on the Board, its provision for a sinking fund for continued infrastructure investment and its allowance of independent borrowings guaranteed by the state set the M&MTB up for its long life.

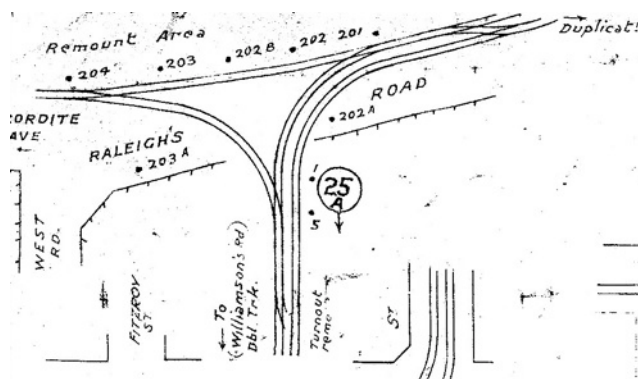
Russell Jones

Clarification

The article *Melbourne’s Emergency Tramways* in the last issue of Bellcord stated:

“Duplication of the tramway from the river to the Explosives Factory commenced in early 1942 and the final stage of the work was completed in August of that year. This included a double track connection from east to south with the Wests Rd branch line – at which time the south to west curve was disconnected.” (page 2)

A diagram sourced in the museum’s collection since the last issue shows that the double track to the Explosives Factory was built in several sections starting at an earlier date of mid 1941 with full duplication completed by mid 1942.



The above diagram shows the stray south to west curve in use during that period. It would have been disconnected when the last bit of the duplication was completed.

Mal Rowe

Museum News



'The Changing Face of Victoria' exhibition.

PHOTO: Warren Doubleday

State Library of Victoria

Throughout 2019, the State Library is hosting a large exhibition entitled *The Changing Face of Victoria*, which includes material on the early cable tram system. The museum provided information about conductor's strip tickets and some references.

The exhibition is publicised as a window into the stories of people, places and events that have shaped life in Victoria. The displays include objects from the Library's collections, ranging from key historical artefacts to items from daily life.

The exhibition is free and located in the Dome Galleries on Level 5 of the library in Swanston St.

Monash University Clayton

Monash University recently approached the museum for assistance with their upcoming multimedia exhibition, *Return: The way back home 1914-20*. The exhibition will provide an insight into the effects of trauma on returning soldiers and their families in the 1920s.

The museum has provided a set of tram seats for the virtual reality (VR) component and assisted with the accuracy of certain details. We understand that visitors to the exhibition will sit on the seats, wear VR headsets and experience Melbourne in the 1920s while riding a tram.

Committee members have been invited to its launch on 23 September.

Cable tram bellcord

This cable tram bellcord was donated to the museum by the Fire Services Museum of Victoria.



Urban sketchers

Members of the Melbourne Urban Sketchers visited the museum on a recent open day to sketch our building and tramcars. Urban Sketchers is a network of artists around the world who draw the cities where they live and visit.

For two hours, 20 men and women sat in various parts of the museum with their small easels, sketch pads and pens to create their images. Many other visitors stopped to watch their progress.

Artist Jan Mills kindly provided us with this copy of her sketch of W2 510.



Artist: Jan Mills (2019)

Annual General Meeting: 12 October

Our AGM will be held in the exhibition room at the museum on Saturday 12 October at 9.30 am, prior to the scheduled open day.

Those receiving a printed copy of this newsletter will receive a notice page in the same envelope. Those receiving this newsletter by email will find a notice page attached to the same email.

Tram-cleaning working bees: 9 & 19 October

Some of our heritage fleet is in need of a little 'spit and polish'.

Members with some spare time and a desire to lend a hand are invited to one of our tram-cleaning working bees during the month of October. Each day we plan to dust and sweep the interiors of two or three trams, clean external windows and body panels, and apply polish to some exteriors.

Choose either Wednesday 9 October, 2019 or Saturday 19 October, 2019 (not a scheduled public open day) from 10.30 am to 2 pm. The museum will provide a complimentary lunch of sandwiches, fruit and tea/coffee.

Bring your old clothes and any of the following: waterproof/working gloves, broom, window washer on pole, bucket and old rags.

RSVP by Saturday 28 September to Geoff Brown at info@trammuseum.org.au with your name and the day you can attend. All offers will be acknowledged by email.

Wednesday public open day: 25 September

The museum is trialling a weekday public opening during the September school holidays on Wednesday 25 September (11am till 3pm only). This is in response to multiple requests by visitors.

Publicity has been undertaken and a number of members have agreed to staff the opening. An increase in the number of open days is always dependent on volunteer availability.

Open House Melbourne Report

Our participation in the Open House Melbourne annual weekend was another major success for us with the attendance of over 1900 visitors. Responses were very positive and supportive of our efforts and knowledge. The publicity increases our exposure in the local community and across Melbourne.

Program organisers have provided some interesting figures. A record 95,000 people visited 200 buildings. 700 volunteers and 2,300 building managers and staff, along with numerous partners and supporters made the program possible.

At our museum, we are grateful to all volunteers who offered their time over both days. The event would not have been such a success without your help. Your time and effort are most appreciated. Any feedback you may have from the event is welcome. Talk to any committee member or email me at info@trammuseum.org.au

Next year, we plan do it all again.

Rod Atkins

The Melbourne Tram Museum is open on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month (except the 4th Saturday of December). Normal opening hours are 11am–5pm. It is also open by appointment.

Upcoming open days are:

14 Sept	25 Sept (Wed in school hols)	28 Sept
12 Oct	26 Oct	9 Nov
		23 Nov
		14 Dec

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