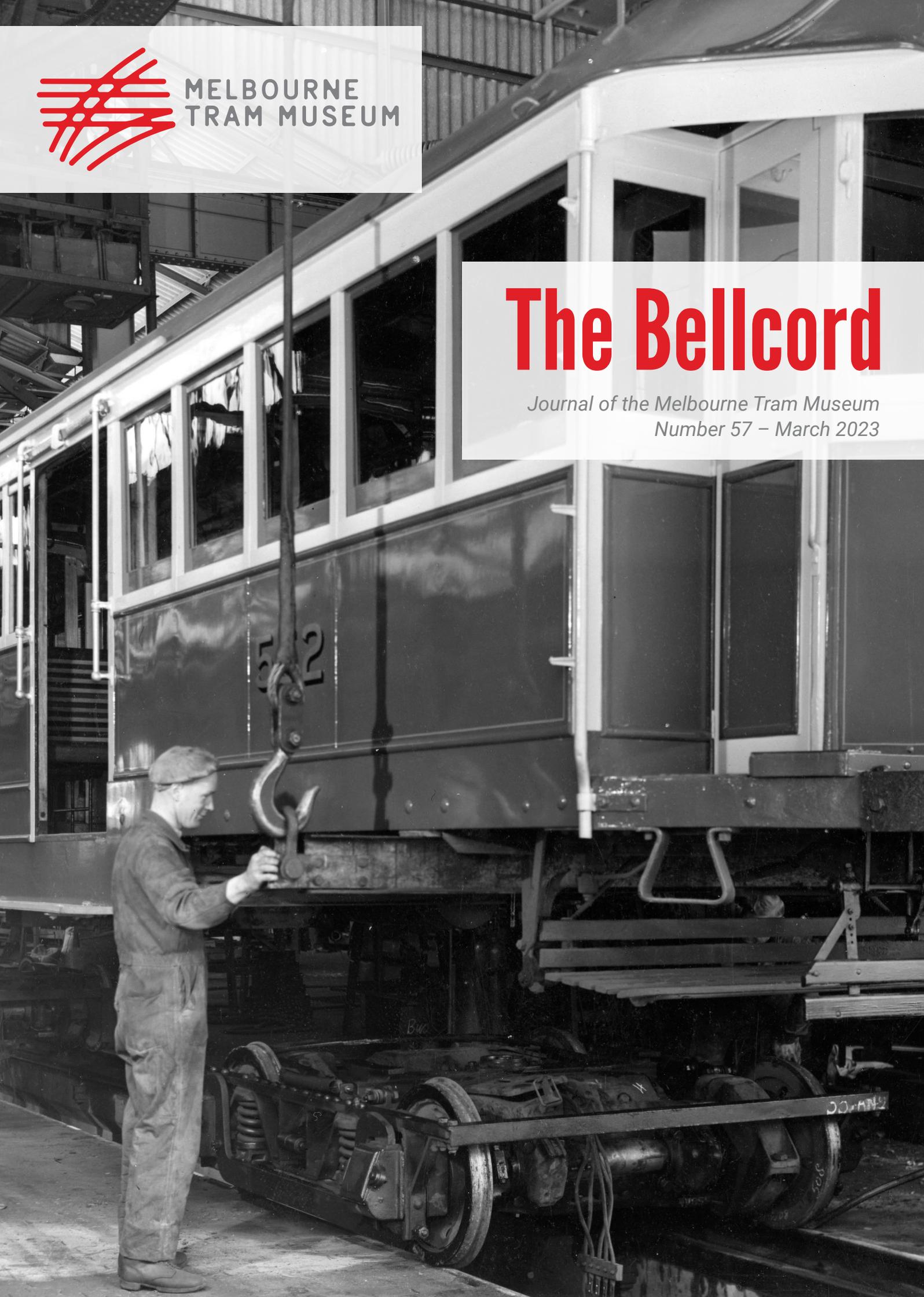


MELBOURNE
TRAM MUSEUM

The Bellcord

Journal of the Melbourne Tram Museum
Number 57 – March 2023



Front cover

Lifting M&MTB W2 No 522 onto its bogies after an overhaul at Preston Workshops, c1929. Photograph from the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

In this issue

Noelle Jones has uncovered the rich life of P. M. Ireland, who in a 44-year career rose from junior draftsman with the Prahran & Malvern Tramway Trust to Rolling Stock Engineer at the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board, in charge of the Preston Workshops and the depots. Ireland was also a Tramway ANZAC, serving as a signalman at Gallipoli and the Western Front in World War I.

Following some inspired detective work, Warren Doubleday has identified a rare photograph of a W2 class tram in Victoria Street, Flemington. This long-vanished line was replaced in 1929 by a more direct route.

For two decades from 1951 the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) operated a scheme to recruit staff from the United Kingdom and Ireland, housing the new migrants in five M&MTB-owned tramway hostels, located in Canterbury, East Malvern, Hawthorn, St Kilda and Toorak. Russell Jones explores the story behind the M&MTB's recruitment scheme and its hostels.

Melbourne Tram Museum
8 Wallen Road
Hawthorn Vic 3122

Postal address:
PO Box 6172
Hawthorn West Vic 3122

E-mail:
editor@trammuseum.org.au

Website:
www.trammuseum.org.au

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Editor: Noelle Jones

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The Melbourne Tram Museum was recently honoured with a mention in Hansard. On 13 February 2023, Dr Monique Ryan, Federal Member for Kooyong, spoke about the need for continued funding of the Trove service, provided by the National Library of Australia, referencing the museum's submission on this matter. Trove is an essential resource for our research on tramway history and is an invaluable aid in developing material for exhibitions, our website and *The Bellcord*.

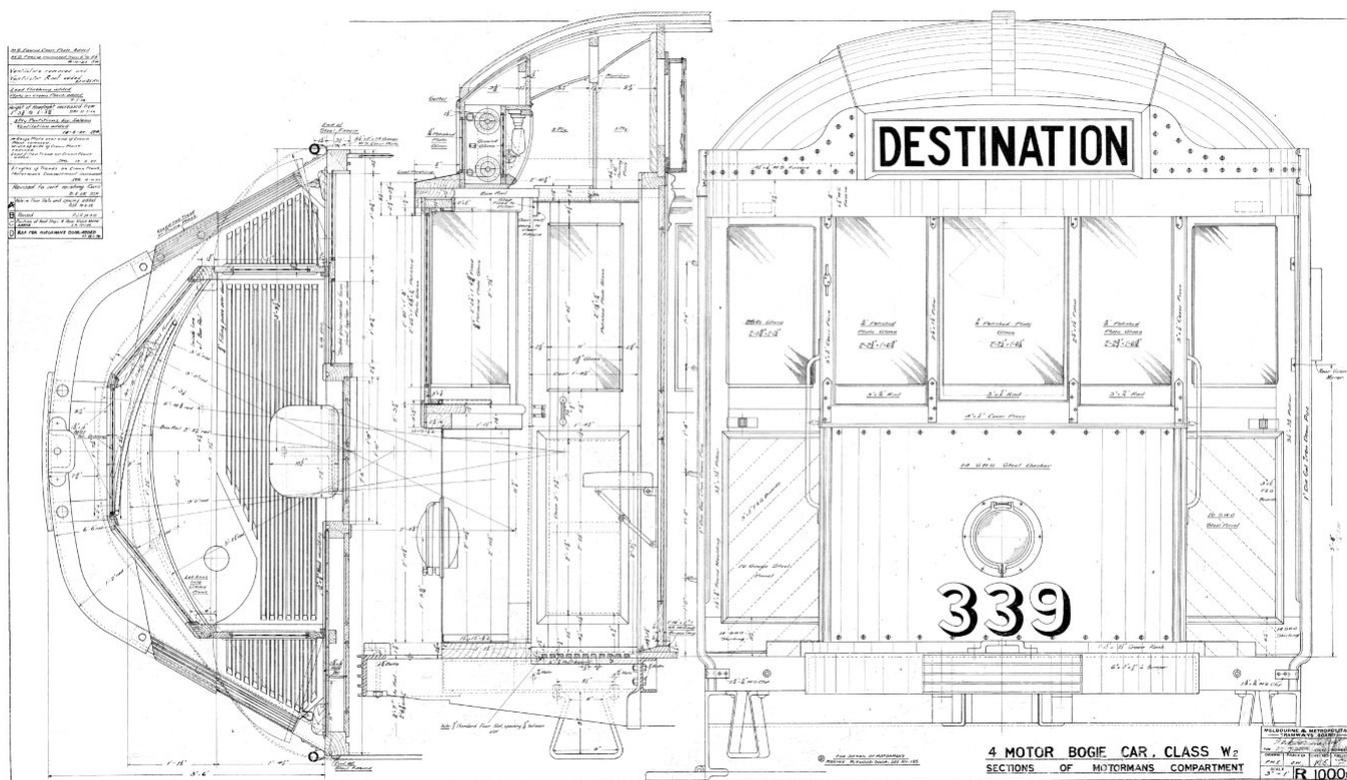
A [transcript](#) and [video](#) of Dr Ryan's speech are available on the Parliament of Australia website.

Dr Ryan subsequently toured the museum on 14 March, when she also discussed Trove with museum representatives.

A range of new items celebrating Melbourne's infamous hook turns is now available in the museum shop. From Mixed Business, the items include magnets, greeting cards, pins and tea towels. All proceeds from our sales go towards supporting the museum.



Dr Monique Ryan on cable car no 28 with museum committee members Kevin Taig and Russell Jones, 14 March 2023. Photograph by Julia Cutts.



P.M. Ireland: tramway engineer and ANZAC

The Melbourne Tram Museum holds a vast number of technical drawings and plans in its collection, currently in the process of being digitised. Each of these items is marked with the initials of its creators – one of whom was Percy Markham De Courcy Ireland (1893-1976).

Percy had a 44-year career with Melbourne tramways. Described at his 1958 retirement function as one of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramway Board's most popular officers, he was considered to have unequalled experience in tramcar construction, operations and maintenance. In addition, he served in both World War I and World War II and was an active supporter of Social Credit – an economic and social reform movement that became popular in the 1930s.

Early years

Percy was born in Horsham in 1893, where his father, De Courcy Ireland (1845-1935), was a solicitor with his own practice. His mother, Margaret Elizabeth Carter (1859-1932), was De Courcy's second wife and a descendent of the Bonham Carter family, prominent in several spheres of British life, including politics, the judiciary and the military. De Courcy had previously spent several years in Fiji, where he and one of his brothers ran a cotton plantation, and where he was a member of Fiji's first parliament before returning to Victoria in 1875.

Above: Drawings of the driver's compartment for a W2 class tramcar, drawn by P. M. Ireland and approved by Chief Engineer T. P. Strickland, 25 July 1925. In the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.



Percy Ireland, Photograph taken in 1908 for the Jubilee of Melbourne Grammar School. Photograph courtesy of Melbourne Grammar School.

The extended Ireland family was prominent in early Melbourne society. Percy's paternal grandfather, Richard Davies Ireland QC (1815-1877), was also a lawyer. An Irish barrister, he emigrated to Melbourne in 1853 with his wife and eight children. For 20 years, R.D. Ireland was Victoria's leading criminal lawyer, establishing his reputation in 1855 with his defence of the Eureka Stockade defendants. By all accounts, he was a barrister very much in the mould of the fictional 'Rumpole of the Bailey', relying on his considerable talents for eloquence and wit, rather than a deep knowledge of the law. R.D. Ireland was also active in Victorian politics for just over a decade, being elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1857 and serving as solicitor-general and attorney-general.

By 1898 De Courcy Ireland and his family had left Horsham and by 1903 he was running a practice in Narre Warren, relocating to Springvale by 1908.

Like his father before him, Percy attended Melbourne Grammar School. He was in the senior school from 1908 to 1909, where he spent ten months in the school's cadet corps.

After completing school, Percy enrolled as a day student in the three-year Electrical Engineering diploma at the Working Men's College (now RMIT University) and was admitted as a student member of the Electrical Association of Australia in 1912. According to his student record, his studies did not progress smoothly – they spanned the period 1911-18 and included several gaps.

Start of a tramway career

By 1913 the Ireland family had moved to Heidelberg and then in January 1914 Percy started work with the [Pahran & Malvern Tramway Trust](#) (PMTT).

The PMTT was the largest and oldest of the independent municipal electric tramways, opening its first two lines on 30 May 1910.

Coming straight from his engineering studies, Percy would have joined the Engineering Section at the lowest level – Junior Draftsman. Above him, in increasing seniority, were Draftsmen and Engineers, with the team led by the Chief Engineer.

Technical design and development were very much team efforts. Engineers would develop their concepts and specifications, with Draftsmen drawing the plans on paper – under supervision – to meet those specifications. The plans were then traced in ink onto linen, which would be submitted to the Chief Engineer for final approval.

World War I and Gallipoli

On 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. Australia, as a loyal member of the British Empire, pledged its support to Britain.



Members of the Second Divisional Signals Company east of Amiens, France, 1918, where they are repairing a broken or faulty telephone cable. The shallow trench they have dug gives little protection from enemy fire. Image courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.

Just a couple of weeks before the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915, Percy enlisted as a sapper in Second Australian Division Signal Company. According to his enlistment papers, Percy was slightly built – just 5 feet 7 inches (1.70 metres) tall, weighing 10 stone (63.5kg), with a chest measurement of 34 inches (86cm) – and one month shy of his 22nd birthday.

He was promptly sent off to Egypt on HMAT A39 Port Macquarie, embarking from Melbourne on 4 May.

The role of Divisional Signal Companies was to provide communications during warfare – essential for commanders to keep in contact with their troops. During World War I this was achieved with field telephony, using wire lines, which were buried where possible but otherwise ran over the ground. Towards the end of the war there was some limited use of wireless, but the radio sets were cumbersome and had greater requirements for power – thus were not always feasible under combat conditions.

Signallers (sappers) laid the telephony wires and kept them operational. They were required to be proficient in map reading and manual signalling – Morse code via flag, lamp or heliograph – which was essential when a telephone network was not available or inoperable. Signallers also often acted as dispatch riders, on foot, bicycles or motorbikes.

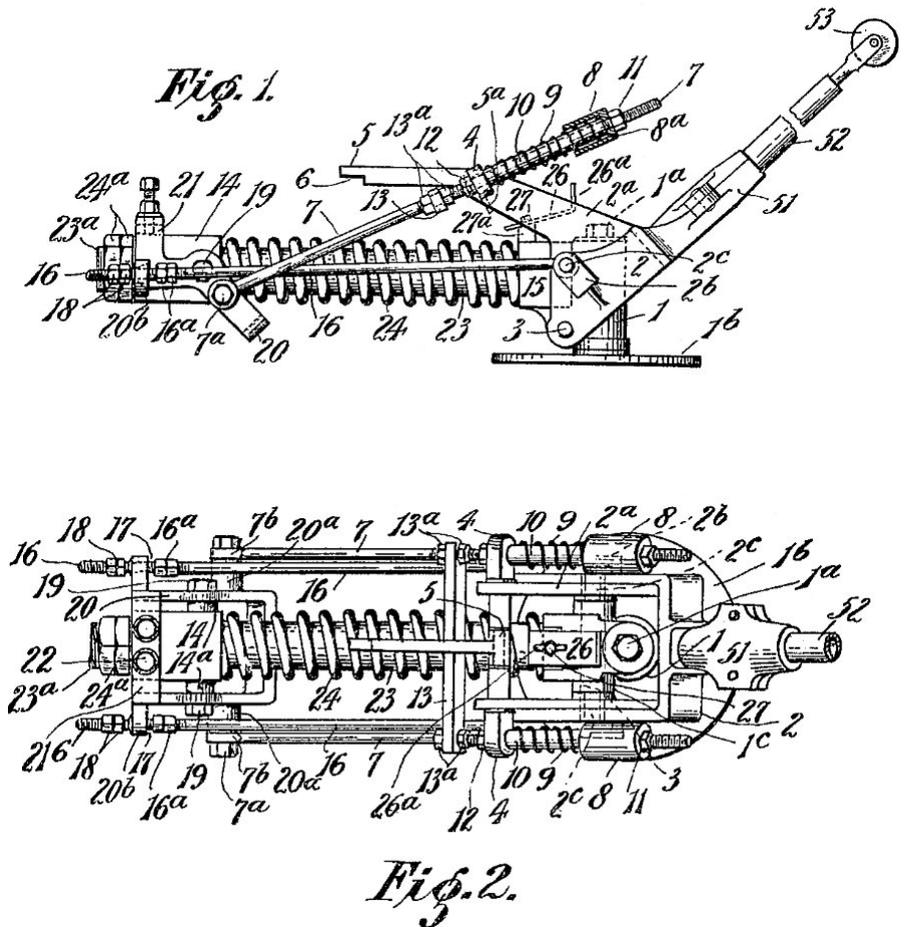
It was a dangerous role, as these duties required signallers to be highly exposed to enemy fire.

Percy was one of the men of the Second Division being shipped from Alexandria to Gallipoli when their transport, HMT Southland, was attacked on 2 September 1915 by the German submarine UB14. The ship was around 56km from the Greek island of Lemnos when it was hit by a torpedo. It did not sink immediately, enabling 1400 men to leave the ship via lifeboats. The survivors were picked up by other transports later that day, however 14 men were killed in the explosion and a further 22 drowned. Percy arrived in Gallipoli a few days later.

Percy spent three months at Gallipoli before the Australian troops were evacuated in December 1915. The Second Division was then transferred to France and the Western Front. Percy arrived in France in March 1916 and took part in the action in the Somme in July 1916. Wounded in action with an ankle injury, he was evacuated to England on 2 August 1916. Due to a subsequent illness he spent nearly five months in hospital, eventually returning to the Western Front in October 1917, in the midst of the Battle of Passchendaele.

After the cessation of hostilities, Percy left France in February 1919, returning to Melbourne in May 1919. He was discharged in August 1919.

Drawings from P. M. Ireland's 1920 Australian patent application number 15,487/20 for a trolley pole safety apparatus for electric trams. Available from IP Australia.



Civilian life

Back in Melbourne, Percy resumed employment with the tramways. He was accepted as a Junior Member of the Institution of Engineers, Australia in 1919, the year the Institution was founded, however was not admitted as an Associate Member until 1930.

In February 1920 the various municipal tramway trusts – including the PMTT – were merged into a single entity, the [Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board \(M&MTB\)](#). An M&MTB list of its employees notes that by June 1920 Percy had become a Draftsman.

That same year Percy lodged a patent application for a trolley pole safety apparatus for electric trams. This device was designed to prevent a spring-controlled trolley pole from fouling the overhead wire if the trolley wheel broke or became disengaged. The patent was accepted in 1921 and was also registered in New Zealand, France, Great Britain, Canada, Germany and the United States.

There is no evidence that the M&MTB or other tramway in Australia or New Zealand implemented Percy's device.

Six years after returning from his military service, Percy married Lillian Maud Harewood Lascelles (1894-1989). The family settled in Heidelberg and soon expanded to include two sons.

Informal group photograph of 3rd Division Engineers militia in camp at Wesburn, February 1936. Captain P.M. Ireland is at the far left. Seventh from the left is Major General Thomas Blamey, Commander in Chief, 3rd Division; next to Lieutenant Colonel Fred G. Thorpe, Commander 3rd Division Engineers. Photograph courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.



Joining the Militia

After its heavy expenditure during World War I the Federal Government slashed its defence budget. In 1922 large numbers of permanent military personnel were retrenched. Training quotas for the compulsory military service scheme ("Universal Training") – introduced in 1911 – were reduced. Then in 1929 the Government abolished compulsory military service. The stated aim was to maintain a volunteer force based on the part-time Citizen Military Forces (also known as the Militia).

In 1927 Percy signed up with the Militia and was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Australian Engineers.

Over the period from May 1932 to June 1938 Percy was Acting Adjutant and Temporary Quartermaster in 3rd Division Engineers. He was promoted to Captain in November 1933 and then in January 1939 he was promoted to Major. Three months later he was appointed Deputy Assistant Director of Engineer Stores, District Base Headquarters.

The Douglas Social Credit Movement

The Great Depression of the 1930s proved to be fertile ground for various populist proposals for economic and societal reform. One of the more prominent movements was that of Social Credit, a doctrine developed by Major C.H. Douglas (1879-1952), a British engineer.

Douglas' reforms have been described as:

... an engineer's view of the economic re-organization necessary for the betterment of the lower classes, the alleviation of scarcity, and the loosening of the noose which the existing financial system held around the neck of productive industry. [Janet Martin-Nielsen]



Major Clifford Hugh Douglas (1879-1952), British engineer and founder of the Social Credit movement. Photograph courtesy of Glenbow Archives.

Social Credit was almost universally dismissed by economists – Douglas' foundation 'A+B theorem' was flawed and the Social Credit policies were claimed to be inflationary. Nevertheless Social Credit was supported by many prominent individuals worldwide and was most notably successful in influencing political parties in Canada and New Zealand.

Percy was an enthusiastic supporter of Social Credit – he was honorary secretary of the Victorian Douglas Credit Reform Movement. In 1936 he presented a proposal for monetary reform to the 1936 Royal Commission into Australia's Monetary and Banking System. Over the period 1931 to 1947 he gave numerous lectures on Social Credit at various locations across Melbourne – a key part of the movement's strategy to popularise its ideas.

Social Credit had some support within the Australian Labor Party during the early 1930s, however this waned due to the fear that the movement – once it had started to field candidates in elections – would fragment the Labor vote. Subsequently differences over policy and tactics split the Australian Social Credit movement into various factions, after which membership declined rapidly.

World War II military service

Eleven days after the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939, the members of the Militia were called up for active service. Under the Defence Act 1903, the Militia could not be compelled to serve outside Australia or its territories – this area was subsequently extended to the South-Western Pacific Zone by the Defence (Citizen Military Forces) Act 1943.

The upper age limit in 1939 for enlisted men was 35, but was higher for officers – 40 years, under exceptional circumstances, for Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers and 45 years for Lieutenant-Colonels.

Nonetheless Percy, 46 years old with a rank of Major, was seconded for staff duties in September 1939, shortly after the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, announced that the nation was at war.

Initially his position was Assistant Director, Engineer Stores, Southern Command (the Australian Army command area or military district covering Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania during the period from October 1939 to April 1942). Over the course of the war, Percy progressed through a series of senior military and civilian appointments. In September 1940 he was appointed Deputy Director of Mechanization, Ordnance Branch, Army Headquarters, with a temporary promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel.

Over the two decades since the end of World War I, military forces recognised the need to innovate using mechanical methods – referred to during this period as 'mechanisation'. Transport was evolving from horse power to tanks, trucks, armoured cars, Bren gun carriers and a variety of non-armoured vehicles.



Pressing hemispheres for construction of mines, Melbourne, December 1940. Photograph by E.L. Cranstone, in the collection of the Australian War Memorial.

The challenge for the military was not simply to acquire and maintain this modern equipment, but also to adapt to new modes of operation and tactics that were enabled through new technology – a situation that still remains highly relevant today.

However, for the Australian Army the mechanisation process had been slow, due primarily to financial constraints during the 1920s and 1930s. This meant that by the start of World War II the Army was woefully underprepared. Many branches of the Army were still reliant on a mix of motorised and horse transport. After the outbreak of war, the move to becoming a fully mechanised force was accelerated, and Percy had a key part in that process.

In May 1941 Percy was seconded from his mechanisation role to the Department of Munitions. Although this was a civilian position, he retained his rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Established in 1940, the Department was created to facilitate the manufacture, acquisition and provision of various military supplies. Initially ‘munitions’ was defined to include armaments, arms, ammunition, weapons, vehicles, machines and aircraft; locomotives, ships and small craft were later added, while aircraft later became the responsibility of a separate Department of Aircraft Production.

The war’s first two years had enabled Australia to organise for the war effort without the threat of direct attack. Industry supporting the war effort had expanded, with around 35 new government munitions factories and 77 munitions annexes built or under construction by the time Japan entered the war in December 1941. By 1941, it was estimated that munitions manufacture had directly engaged 50,000 workers, with a further 150,000 workers indirectly engaged.

According to the Australian War Memorial’s Second World War Official History, the most useful achievement was not the munitions output over those first two years, but the establishment of the factories and the creation of the organisation that facilitated the rapid expansion required for the increased demand during 1942 and 1943. Percy, with his senior role in the Department of Munitions, would have been deeply involved in that achievement.

In July 1945 Percy was transferred to the Reserve of Officers. Germany had already surrendered, however the war in the Pacific continued until 15 August 1945.

Return to the tramways

After his war service, Percy returned to the M&MTB and its Preston Workshops.

The Workshops had been established on a 17 acre (7 hectare) site in the mid 1920s, providing facilities to build and maintain the M&MTB’s tram fleet.

Within the site was a blacksmith and foundry, mechanical/electrical shop, lifting/body shop, paint shop, and central store, as well as offices and recreation facilities. In 1928 – the peak year of new tramcar construction – the Workshops had nearly 500 employees, who over the course of the year built 53 new W class tramcars and serviced a further 734 tramcars.

The M&MTB clearly found Percy's experience during the war years to be invaluable. His career rapidly progressed through senior management positions at the Workshops, where he controlled the organisation and output of this large manufacturing facility. Percy was appointed Assistant Manager of Preston Workshops in 1946, and then promoted to Manager in 1950.

The following year Percy was appointed Rolling Stock Engineer, in charge of the Workshops and the Running Sheds (depots). While in that role he oversaw the construction of 70 new tramcars, comprising the entire Bourke Street and Nicholson Street fleet following the conversion of those services from buses to electric trams in the mid-1950s.

Percy continued as Rolling Stock Engineer until he retired from the M&MTB in May 1958, after 44 years of service with Melbourne tramways.

He passed away on 12 December 1976, aged 83, survived by his wife, his two sons and their families.

Noelle Jones

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the resources at Australian War Memorial, National Archives of Australia, National Library of Australia (Trove), RMIT Archives and State Library Victoria. Thanks also to Warren Doubleday, Ros Escott, Russell Jones, Ken McInnes, Joy Olney and Luisa Moscato, archivist at Melbourne Grammar School.

Past senior employees at M&MTB Head Office Christmas function, 1965. From left to right: H. R. Steains (Architect), H. S. McComb (Chief Surveyor), W. Aird, P.M. Ireland (Rolling Stock Engineer), J. Fisher (Civil Engineer) and H. A. Warner (Secretary). From M&MTB News, January 1966, in the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.





Victoria Street Flemington tram line

In 1906 The North Melbourne Electric Tramways and Lighting Co. Ltd (NMETL) launched its tramway service. This private company operated two tram lines plus an impressive power station situated on the land now occupied by Essendon Depot. The two lines both commenced on the north side of the bridge over Moonee Ponds Creek in Mount Alexander Road – the cable tram terminus being located on the south side. One line terminated at Saltwater River (Maribyrnong River) with the other terminating at the corner of Mount Alexander Road and Keilor Road.

To reach Saltwater River, the two lines diverged at the corner of Victoria Street and Mount Alexander Road. Trams then travelled along Victoria Street and Racecourse Road, serving Flemington, the Showgrounds, Flemington Racecourse, Ascot Vale and finally the river terminus which was a popular recreational location.

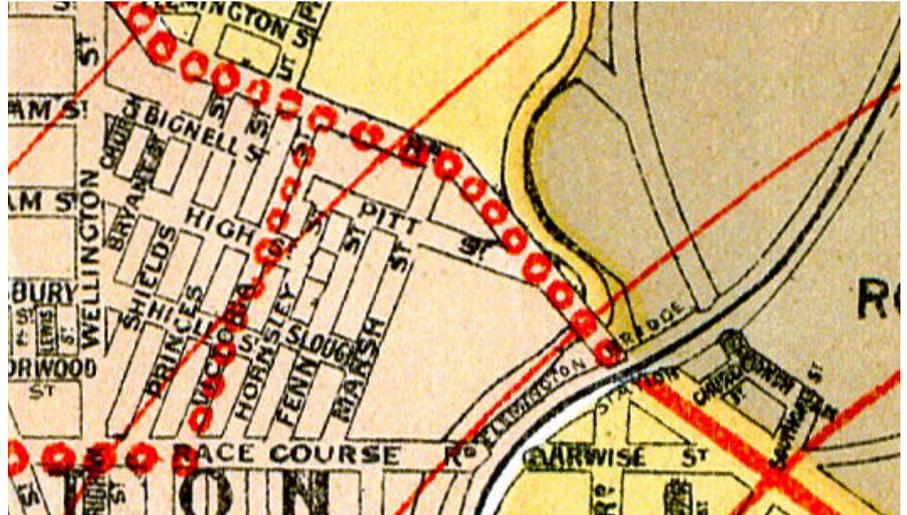
The museum was not aware of any photographs of trams in Victoria Street, Flemington until one recently turned up on a Facebook page. After a bit of detective work, the original of the photograph was found in the University of Melbourne Archives, Architectural Faculty, illustrating Town Planning issues. It was just luck that the tram happened to be in the shot.

Labelled 'Barwise St. North Melbourne' the photograph shows a W2 class tram in the 440 series emerging from Victoria Street before turning into Racecourse Road. Barwise Street – now known as Racecourse Road – was the section of road between Flemington Road and Moonee Ponds Creek.

The large building under repair is the former Royal Hall, built in 1886 for John Crichton, and located at 2-4 Princess Street. The hall was used for meetings and various forms of entertainment – concerts, balls and social events. By 1917 it was being used as a cinema, and in 1924 a fire damaged the ground floor which was occupied by a furniture manufacturer. The building was finally demolished in the 1970s. Behind the tram, the corner block with the advertising hoardings is now occupied by a car park for a fast-food outlet.

Above: A relatively new W2 class tram emerging from Victoria Street Flemington before turning into Racecourse Road, c1928. Image from the University of Melbourne Architecture, Building and Planning Library Glass Slides Collection.

Detail from a 1906 Sands and McDougall map showing the two NMETL tram routes through Flemington. From the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the Melbourne Tramway Timeline, National Library of Australia (Trove), University of Melbourne, Geoff Warburton and Alex Bragiola from the Essendon Historical Society.

These advertisements promote products and firms, once household names, but now long gone. McAlpin’s flour, produced by J. McAlpin & Sons in Abbotsford. Witch soap, from J. Kitchen & Sons in Port Melbourne. Rowlands soda water from Ballarat. Wirth Brothers’ circus. Atkin’s quinine tonic wine. From Britain, the Nugget Polish Company.

One of those advertised products is still available: Brasso, a cleaning product for brassware, manufactured by Reckitt, a UK firm founded in 1819.

The NMETL was acquired by the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) in 1922. The tramline in Victoria Street was replaced on 4 August 1929 by the more direct line between Flemington Road and Victoria Street, built by the M&MTB. This used the Moonee Ponds Creek bridge, originally constructed in 1887 but rebuilt for trams during the first half of 1929.

The photograph is estimated to be from around 1928, based on the dates for the tram – note the absence of route number boxes, which were being installed around this time – and the Royal Hall fire. Trams 440 to 449 entered service between 16 August and 8 October 1927 – about one new tram every four days.

Warren Doubleday

M&MTB tram W4 670 in a very quiet Racecourse Road crossing the Moonee Ponds Creek about 1940. Today the road is very busy and this relatively low railway bridge on the Upfield line is often struck by high vehicles. Photograph by Wal Jack, in the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.





SINGLE MEN (AGE 19-40)

ENJOY A SUNNY LIFE IN A LAND OF OPPORTUNITY AND
EARN £23^A A WEEK
 (\$46^A)
**IN AUSTRALIA AS CONDUCTORS
 ON MELBOURNE BUSES & TRAMS**

No Experience Necessary · £10 Passages Arranged · Accommodation Assured
 ★ INTERVIEWS IN YOUR AREA WILL TAKE PLACE SHORTLY

To Mr. Keith Allen, C/o Agent General for Victoria, Victoria House,
 Melbourne Place, London, W.C.2.
 I am interested in the opportunities offered in your advertisement,
 and would like to know more

NAME

ADDRESS

Tramway hostels and overseas recruitment

In 1950, the Australian post-war economy was booming. Rationing had finally been abolished, full employment was federal government policy, and the mass immigration policy was starting to hit its full stride, with over 150,000 migrants arriving in Australia that same year.

Many of the jobs created were in new manufacturing industries such as motor vehicle production, which offered high rates of pay and good working conditions, including an eight-hour day. However, the changing economic environment was not good news for the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB).

Since the end of the Second World War, the M&MTB experienced difficulties in hiring and retaining staff. While it had been a trailblazer in the employment of women as tram conductresses during the war at equal pay rates – for the first time in Australia’s labour history – the women had been employed on a hostilities-only basis. The intention was that ex-servicemen returning from the war would resume their original jobs, leaving no roles for the women.

By the end of 1946 all conductresses had been dismissed, but this decision had to be reversed due to ongoing staff shortages. From August 1947 the M&MTB commenced rehiring many of its former conductresses, although this was only a partial solution.

Above: UK newspaper advertisement c1966 seeking tram conductors for Melbourne. From the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

The basic issues driving poor staff retention rates by the M&MTB were a combination of higher pay rates being available in industry, and less than ideal working conditions on the tramways.

**CONDUCTORS and
CONDUCTRESSES**
Required Immediately

CONDUCTORS, 18 to 45 years
CONDUCTRESSES, 18 to 38 years
Full Male Adult Rates of Pay.
40-HOUR WEEK.
(Inquiries Invited from Ex-Employees).

Good Wages, with Time and a Half for Saturday
and Double Time for Sunday and Holiday Work.
Continuity and Security of Employment with Good
Working Conditions — Free Travelling — Uniform
Provided — Generous Annual Leave — Cumulative
Sick Leave — Retiring Gratuities — Six Months'
Long Service Leave

Apply Personally with References to:
**ROOM 6, TRAMWAY OFFICES,
616 LITTLE COLLINS STREET.**
9.30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday,
or ring MB1721, Extn. 12, for Further Information.

*Advertisement for tram conductors from
the Melbourne Argus, 4 June 1955.
Courtesy National Library of Australia.*

While employment with the tramways was generally seen by the public as a good, secure job, the reality was somewhat different. Melbourne trams were unheated and draughty, bone chillingly cold in winter and baking hot in summer. Standing in a swaying tramcar without hanging on while issuing fares was challenging, as the weight of pre-decimal coinage in conductors' bags increased steadily throughout a shift until it became a significant physical burden.

Then there was dealing with the Melbourne public, who were often difficult, and the constant surveillance of traffic staff by inspectors, ready to enforce the quasi-military discipline that was part of the conditions of employment – including assessment of the wearing of uniforms. Any lapse in standards could result in disciplinary action.

However the major issue for many traffic staff was the working hours. While a five-day forty-hour working week was implemented in 1948, early morning, evening and weekend work was expected, which was a considerable impost on what is now called work-life balance.

Due to the staff shortages, significant overtime work was required. While no doubt the extra income was well-received in many cases, constant demands for overtime may not have been welcomed by all employees.

In addition, 'split shifts' were standard practice, where traffic staff would work for four hours covering the morning peak, followed by four hours covering the evening peak, with an unpaid break of about four hours in between. General practice was to assign junior traffic staff to split shifts, while senior staff with many years' service were automatically given preference for eight-hour unbroken shifts – not a practice that encouraged junior staff to stay.

Furthermore, any negative discrepancies in conductors' pay-ins at the end of the day were deducted from their wages.

All of these issues – well-entrenched in the culture of the organisation – presented difficulties for the M&MTB in retaining staff.

Furthermore, a protracted strike between February and April 1950 resulted in the loss of many traffic staff, as they found alternative employment.

To address its manpower shortage, the M&MTB continued an existing intensive advertising campaign to attract staff and lowered the minimum age of male and female conductors from 21 to 18 years.

While these initiatives had some impact, the Board determined that its staffing needs could not be met from domestic recruiting alone. Therefore, the manager (G.F. Wraith) and staff clerk (W.J. Richards) were sent by air to the United Kingdom in April 1951 to recruit up to 1,000 single men between the ages of 23 and 30, for employment as conductors. Preference was to be given to candidates with previous public transport experience in the United Kingdom or Ireland.

Window display in Victoria House, London advertising the M&MTB's overseas conductor program in 1952. From the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.



In London, they engaged with the Agent General for Victoria (Hon. J.H. Lienhop) to begin recruitment efforts, with additional support being provided by both the Commonwealth and Victorian Immigration Departments.

Advertisements were run in UK national newspapers, together with a program of cinema advertising promoting the benefits of working for the M&MTB in Melbourne. The Chairman of the M&MTB also wrote directly to the Chair of the London Passenger Transport Board, The Rt. Hon. Lord Ashfield PC, asking if the recruitment program could be publicised in the LPTB staff magazine. Unfortunately news of the restructure of the organisation responsible for London transport and the death of Lord Ashfield in 1948 apparently had not reached the M&MTB, so it is unclear if this request had any effect.

Recruitment action ceased in January 1952, when Wraith and Richards returned to Australia.

Over the financial year 1951-52, 729 recruits came to Melbourne under the scheme, their travel subsidised by the Commonwealth under the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme – the beneficiaries colloquially known as Ten Pound Poms. Recruits were required to pay travel costs of just ten pounds per person. However, staff retention remained a problem, as 43% of the newly recruited staff either resigned or were dismissed within the first 12 months of the program.

Three guest houses – in Canterbury, East Malvern and Hawthorn – were purchased by the M&MTB as hostels to house the immigrant employees for up to the first 12 months of their employment. The tramway hostels were located in reasonable proximity to tram depots and public transport. However, these three premises were not sufficient for demand, so an additional two properties were acquired, providing accommodation for a total of 449 men.

Tramway hostel capital expenditure. From the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

Name	Address	No of beds	Purchase price	Cost of improvements	Cost per bed
Canterbury Mansions	208 Maling Road, Canterbury	70	£29,771	£16,451	£660
Warwick	Cnr. Finch Street and Kerferd Road, East Malvern	75	£17,346	£5,354	£303
Cavendish House	400 Burwood Road, Hawthorn	139	£44,162	£5,252	£355
Kyalite	601 Toorak Road, Toorak	100	£37,838	£10,481	£483
Inveravon	31 Burnett Street, St Kilda	65	£30,240	£1,156	£483

Chairman of the M&MTB, [R.J.H. Risson](#), was reprimanded by the State Government for not seeking Government approval before purchasing a 'Toorak mansion' (Kyalite) for conversion into a tramway hostel, although it did not reverse the purchase. None of the other purchases received this type of criticism, although subsequent purchases of mansion homes, boarding houses or buildings by departments or statutory authorities required Cabinet approval, as there was considerable adverse media reporting regarding the purchase of tramway hostels.

The total cost of the five properties, including purchase and improvements, was £198,051 over the period to the end of June 1952, equivalent to \$9.7 million in 2022. It should be noted that the M&MTB ran a significant operating loss on the tramway hostels.

The cost of hostel accommodation was deducted by the M&MTB from staff members' wages. To assist new recruits in finding their way around Melbourne, in 1951 the M&MTB issued a map with the tram and bus network, which showed the location of the five tramway hostels.

Some of the recruited staff were placed in private accommodation, although this was difficult to arrange, as the nature of their employment meant that meals were required at odd hours, from early morning to late at night. Many rooming house proprietors were unwilling to provide this level of service.

For men housed privately, the rent was subsidised so they were only charged the same rate as those housed in tramway hostels. However, due to the high staff turnover, places soon became available in the tramway hostels, and the practice of using private rooming houses ceased by May 1952.

After 12 months' employment, staff were expected to leave the tramway hostels and find their own accommodation.

In May 1952, the M&MTB raised the weekly rent for its hostels by 22/- to £4/5/-, prompting a complaint by a resident of Cavendish House. Since

starting employment the previous year, his wages had only increased by 18/-. In response, the M&MTB Chairman stated that “for its quality, it is the cheapest board in Melbourne”.

A reporter from The Herald inspected the facilities at the tramway hostels and supported the Chairman’s claim. At Cavendish House, described as typical of the hostels, most men were accommodated in single rooms, although there were a few share rooms and small dormitories. Rooms were cleaned daily. Bathrooms were tiled and laundry facilities were available free of charge. Meals were available at times suitable for tramway shifts.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the M&MTB ran more recruitment campaigns for traffic staff in the United Kingdom and Ireland, as staff shortages dictated, although the numbers were significantly reduced from that of the initial program, rarely comprising more than one or two hundred recruits per year. However, the M&MTB did broaden the program selection criteria to allow for the hiring of conductresses over the period from 1955 until 1964. Note that women were not eligible to become tram drivers until 1975. In later years, the M&MTB also hired bus drivers under the program.

The overseas recruitment program finally ceased in 1972. By then, all five tramway hostels had long since been sold.

In hindsight, the acquisition of tramway hostels was a poor investment by the M&MTB. Tram and bus patronage fell dramatically through the 1950s, caused primarily by the growth in private motor vehicle ownership. This resulted in a reduction in tram and bus services, also reducing the need for traffic staff. The overseas recruitment program never again reached the scale achieved in the first year, thus dedicated tramway hostels were no longer required, as demonstrated by their early sale.

Canterbury Mansions

The most visible of the tramway hostels was Canterbury Mansions, located at 208 Maling Road, Canterbury. It is the only one of the five former tramway hostel buildings still in existence.

Positioned on a prominent site at the corner of Canterbury and Maling Roads, it was originally built in 1889 for William Malone as the Canterbury Club Hotel, but became known as Malone’s Family Hotel, the sign still being visible on the western wall. It was designed by the architect William Wolf in the popular Italianate typical of the Melbourne ‘land boom’ era.

The building is unusual in that the stables at the rear of the hotel are still intact, as is the kitchen wing, although they have long since been converted for other purposes.

In 1920, the hotel was delicensed due to the passing of the Local Option Poll, which closed all hotels in the municipalities of Camberwell and Box Hill. It was then converted to a boarding house known as Canterbury Mansions.

Canterbury Mansions. Official M&MTB photograph, in the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.





Warwick Guest House, East Malvern. Official M&MTB photograph in the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

The property was purchased by the M&MTB for use as a tramway hostel in June 1951. It was sold in 1955, although the mortgage was not discharged until 1966, the M&MTB offering finance to the purchaser.

Canterbury Mansions is now occupied by a number of medical practices and other businesses on the ground floor, while the upper floors are now stylish apartments.

Warwick

A substantial two-storey brick residence, originally known as Walla Walla, was built prior to 1886 on the corner of Finch Street and Kerferd Streets, East Malvern. The property was acquired in 1908 to provide larger premises for Warwick Girls' School, which had been established in 1895. Over 200 pupils attended the school, including boarders as well as day pupils.

The school closed in 1942 when the property was commandeered for use by the RAAF. By 1947 the property had become a guest house and was purchased by the M&MTB in 1951. It was sold in May 1955.

Cavendish House

The imposing four-storey Hawthorn Coffee Palace opened in 1889. Designed by architects Kohler & Beatty and costing £84,000 to build, it included 80 bedrooms, as well as a dining hall and three sitting rooms. For recreation, there was a billiards room, an outside lawn tennis court and a bowling green.



The magnificent Hawthorn Coffee Palace, c1889. Photograph by Charles Rudd, in the collection of State Library Victoria.



Inveravon, St Kilda, c1949. Photograph by Colin Caldwell, courtesy of State Library Victoria.

Powered by the temperance movement, a number of coffee palaces had been built in Melbourne during the 1880s. These 'temperance hotels' offered all the amenities and facilities of residential hotels but did not sell alcoholic beverages. By 1888 there were more than 50 coffee palaces across the city and suburbs, however economic depression in the 1890s coupled with an inability to compete effectively with conventional hotels resulted in many of the coffee palaces either closing or becoming licensed premises.

In 1901 the Hawthorn Coffee Palace was renamed 'Glenferrie House', but continued to be operated as a temperance hotel. In 1923 it became a boarding house called 'Cavendish House'.

Cavendish House was acquired by the M&MTB in June 1951.

Demolished in 1973, the site was a car park for Swinburne Institute of Technology until 1984, when the Applied Sciences School building was constructed on the site.

Kyalite

Kyalite was built in 1890, designed by architects Inskip & Robertson for Mrs Barbara McCrae. After her death in August 1915, the house was converted into fashionable flats. Reports of parties and other functions held at Kyalite often appeared in the society pages of the Melbourne press. Among the residents were Sir William Synnot Manifold MLC (1849-1928), a member of the prominent Manifold family of Western District graziers, who resided at Kyalite from 1919 until his death.

Kyalite – which covered an acre (0.4 hectare) on the corner of Toorak and St Georges Road – was purchased by the M&MTB in November 1951. At the time of purchase, it included a 20-room mansion plus two self-contained flats, each of six rooms. It was sold in March 1957.

The house was subsequently demolished and replaced by an apartment building in the 1960s.

Inveravon

This gentleman's residence was built around 1860, when St Kilda was a fashionable suburb of Melbourne. In the 1880s it was described as a handsome family residence with 10 rooms, stabling and gardens, but by the economic depression of the 1890s it had become a boarding house. The property was known as 'Hinkley' up to the 1930s, later renamed Inveravon.

The State Government approved the purchase of Inveravon by the M&MTB in March 1952. However, it was found to be surplus to requirements and was leased to a private company for use as a boarding house from August 1952, before subsequently being sold, never having housed any tramway staff.

The building was demolished in 1973.

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