



# The Bellcord

Journal of the Friends of Hawthorn Tram Depot

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## Annual General Meeting

This year the Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 12 August 2011 starting at 10am in the conference room. The announcement of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Hawthorn Tram Depot was included with your membership renewal notice. Morning tea will be available from about 9:30am. It is also our normal open day, so please come along, catch up with your fellow volunteers, see what's new around the depot, and let us know your thoughts for our future development.

## Membership Renewals

Your membership renewal has been posted. The annual rate has been maintained at \$25.00 for the coming year. Your early renewal would be appreciated by the Treasurer. Renewals will be accepted on the day of the Annual General Meeting. The Secretary apologises for omitting to include the addressed envelope to the Association with your renewal notice. We will try to get that right next year. If you have sent your renewal to the

Treasurer already, we thank you for your continued support and involvement.

## Depot News

Tramcar lighting and power supply to the driver training chassis is still proceeding at a snail's pace! Dull winter days reduce the light inside the trams so much that a close eye is kept on our visitors to ensure they do not get lost in the atmospheric gloom.

## Open Days – 2011

|             |              |             |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 13 August   | 10 September | 8 October   |
| 22 October  | 12 November  | 26 November |
| 10 December |              |             |

Hawthorn Depot is open the second Saturday of every month, and the fourth Saturday of the month during the daylight saving period except for December. Opening hours are 11am-5pm.

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E-mail: [info@hawthorntramdepot.org.au](mailto:info@hawthorntramdepot.org.au).

Address: PO Box 178, Hawthorn Victoria 3122

Museum: 8 Wallen Road, Hawthorn Victoria 3122

Website: <http://www.hawthorntramdepot.org.au>

Phone (open days only): (03) 9819 9522.

Editor: John Frost

Design: Russell Jones

Contributors: Rod Atkins, Warren Doubleday



Comments from members would be appreciated in assisting the Committee to choose the best solution.

### Swelling Wood Blocks

Many of us have noticed that the wood blocks at the rear of the depot have swollen from water ingress and lifted up in some locations. This in turn has forced the track out of kilter under the Moomba 'tram'.

A plumber was engaged to address the problem, which was related to a drainage fault outside the building. This has since been fixed and the area is now drying out. However, it is intended to wait for things to settle down, so we will postpone any relaying of the blocks until we are sure the problem has been fixed for good.



*Woodblocking the new electric tram tracks. Can you pick the location? – Photo courtesy State Library of Victoria*

This is one of the few locations where wood blocks survive in Melbourne as tramway-related paving, having disappeared from our roadways. These are a powerful reminder of the changing face of our tramway that can be highlighted to our visitors.

When the editor was young, many of Melbourne's streets were paved in red gum blocks, particularly in

the city and inner suburbs. The tram tracks had wood blocks from rail to rail and in the centre of the road as the tramway authority was responsible for the maintenance of the centre of the road. The blocks were covered with tar to keep them dry from the weather and to provide a wearing surface for road vehicles. Unfortunately red gum is not longer available for this purpose.

### The Bellcord

As part of the ongoing effort to control the costs of running FOHTD, the Committee has decided to alter distribution arrangements for 'The Bellcord', by moving to electronic distribution of our newsletter.

Where FOHTD has members' e-mail addresses as part of their contact details, they will be notified via e-mail of new issues of 'The Bellcord', which will be available for download from the website in PDF format. Notification of new issues will also be available through our RSS feed.

As part of this initiative, all issues of 'The Bellcord' will be moved to the public area of the website from the current private members' zone.

If you do not have access to the Internet, or chose to opt out of electronic distribution by ticking the box on your renewal form, you can continue to receive 'The Bellcord' in hardcopy through the post.

### Website News

Development of our website is focused on behind the scenes work, finalising the customisation of the photo gallery software. Our webmaster is looking for a volunteer (victim?) to take on administration of the gallery once it is ready for launch. Applicants need to be well-versed in the history of Melbourne's tramway system, have experience with photo-editing software and some skill in cataloguing photographs. If you are interested e-mail Russell at [webmaster@hawthorntramdepot.org.au](mailto:webmaster@hawthorntramdepot.org.au).

Other work includes the moving of 'The Bellcord' to the public area of the website, together with the architectural changes to support the change – including the regeneration of every page on the website.



*Latrobe Street looking west towards William Street – left view taken on 28 January 1979, right view on 7 July 2011. Both photographs by Warren Doubleday*

A new article is in preparation on the history of fare evasion on Melbourne's tramways system – a rather topical subject.

### Our Shop

The FOHTD museum shop moves from strength to strength, with sales growing and new stock coming in to match.

New tram featured sales items have been added to our range of gifts and accessories, including:

- Tote bags at \$28.00 each
- Pencil cases at \$12.00 each
- Badges at \$2.50 each
- Cushion covers at \$32.00 each
- Camera/mobile phone covers at \$10.00 each



*Pencil case, tote bag and tram badge (not to scale)*

The booklet by FOHTD member David Frost on Victorian Railways trams is available again. Published by Tramway Publications, this is a valuable guide for all enthusiasts interested in Melbourne's forgotten bayside trams, costing only \$9.00 from our shop.

Additional stock has been delivered of two other booklets – 'By The River' at \$6.00 and 'A Brief History of the MBCTT' at \$7.00.

All these items and more are available from our shop on open days, or can be purchased via mail order – order forms are available for download from our website.

Remember, we now accept credit card and EFTPOS purchases.

### Latrobe Street – Then and Now

Our Secretary, Warren Doubleday has been going through and scanning some of his slides and was struck by the way Melbourne has changed in recent years. Warren concentrated on Latrobe Street and the accompanying photos show how this streetscape has changed over the last thirty-odd years. The two colour photos were taken during the 1979 Transport Extravaganza on 28 January, when visiting trams from Ballarat (No. 14), Bendigo (No. 17) made an appearance alongside TMSV tramcar No. X 217, X2 676 and MMTB V 214.

La Trobe Street, Melbourne has gone through some considerable change in the last thirty two years; yet some things remain very much the same as before.

No major track relay has occurred except for the works associated with the construction of the underground railway, namely between Swanston and Elizabeth Streets and west of William Street. In fact all of the remaining track is as it was originally laid in 1951.

The real changes have been in the construction of many new and high rise buildings between King and William Streets, Melbourne Central and between Spring and Russell Streets. The other major change has been the planting in the early 1980s of the plane trees which are now reaching full maturity.



*Latrobe Street looking east from between Queen and William Streets. Top view 28 January 1979, bottom view 17 July 2011. Both photographs by Warren Doubleday.*

Tram services have changed a bit over the last sixty odd years. Route 30 has remained but has been extended into Docklands and is now on a full seven day timetable. Peak hour services have come and, in most cases, gone down the years: West Preston

Route 13, East Preston Route 14, Mont Albert Route 23. Only North Balwyn Route 24 remains, due to very different routing through Victoria Street Richmond, but still transiting Kew Junction and

St Vincent Plaza to pick up prospective passengers of the former routes.

The biggest change has been the introduction of the City Circle service in 1994, now called route 35. Combined with the Underground Loop Railway, these two initiatives have helped spur major redevelopment of this former sleepy part of Melbourne. Additional curves on the northwest corner with William Street a few years ago now enable Essendon Depot cars to assist with transport for sporting and other events occurring both at Etihad Stadium and the sports and entertainment areas at the Tennis Centre and MCG via Docklands, Spencer and Flinders Streets. The installation of curves at Swanston Street, also on the northwest corner, now enables all southern routes to bypass Swanston Street and St Kilda Road during service disruptions in the central city.

In recent times it has been possible to see all Swanston, Collins, and Bourke Street route trams running in Latrobe Street at the same time.

As a footnote on Warren's photo of Australia Day celebrations in 1979, the bus in the photo is still with Stephen Oliver at Drouin. It now has been in preservation longer than it operated! Built by Symons & Fowler on White Chassis in 1950, the bus is still in its Hoys Passenger Service livery as No. 10.

The old building on the corner of King and La Trobe Streets remains one of only a handful of pre gold rush building still remaining in Victoria (1850). An amazing achievement for a CBD address let alone in the modern hi tech world which now surrounds us.

#### **George Smith Duncan: Tramway Engineer**

In 1852 George Smith Duncan was born to George and Elspeth Duncan of Dunedin, New Zealand, third son in a family of seven boys and four girls. His parents had emigrated from Scotland three years previously.

In the mid-1860s his father took his three eldest boys back to his home country and put them through school at Clifton, England. On finishing school, Duncan attended Edinburgh University to study engineering. Returning to New Zealand, Duncan completed his studies at Otago University at Dunedin, his practical training being carried out with the local firm of Messrs Thompson & Simpson. The young graduate subsequently was appointed

provincial engineer of the District of Otago, and entered into private practice in 1876 as a partner in the firm of Reid & Duncan.

In 1879 he suggested that in light of the development of cable tramways in America, that Dunedin's hilly topography would be ideally suited to this form of transport. As a result, he was granted a concession for seven years to build and operate a cable tramway. The Roslyn cable tramway opened in February 1881, the first cable tramway outside the United States of America.

Although short, it was unusual in that it was a single-track tramway, as most other cable tramways were double track. It proved a success, and was followed by a second line to Mornington, this time double track, which was extended two years later to Maryhill. However, Duncan's association with the Dunedin tramways had ceased at this point, his younger brother Alfred taking over the reins. Cable tram lines continued to be built in Dunedin up to 1906, the last line not being closed until 1957.



**George S. Duncan**  
1852-1930

Despite being engaged in other fields of engineering, Duncan was by now recognised as a world leader in the field of cable tramways. In 1883 he was invited by Francis Boardman Clapp to go to Melbourne as the consulting engineer to the MTOC for construction of the Melbourne tramway system. Subsequently he was appointed engineer to the MTT in May 1884, although he remained consulting engineer to the MTOC.

Clapp and Duncan made a quick trip to the USA to investigate tramway developments, and determined that cable tram technology was the way to go for Melbourne. Construction commenced of the first line in October 1884, from Flinders Street to Richmond.

Construction of the system moved along very smartly, the first route opening on 11 November



*Cable trams in Collins Street, Melbourne circa 1910. From the collection of Russell Jones*

1885, and the last opening on 27 October 1891, a remarkable achievement.

Duncan was an innovator with the technology, taking special care in addressing reducing cable wear around curves, which was a major issue with regard to running costs. Where possible, this was done by diverting the cable away from the slot around a large sheave, requiring the gripman to throw the rope when rounding the curve. He saw no problem with using gravity or momentum running at selected points, although this was not permitted on other systems. It also led to the occasional requirement for passengers to get out and push the tramcar around these curves if the tramcar had been forced to stop.

He also invented and patented the emergency slot-brake, which is used in San Francisco to this day, although it was never used in Melbourne.

Duncan was a shareholder in the independent Clifton Hill to Northcote & Preston Tramway Company, and was supervisory engineer during its construction, although not hold any operating role. This line opened on 18 February 1890, but did not meet commercial success, actually being later abandoned for a period of three years. It was then

acquired by the Northcote City Council and run under a number of franchise agreements before being directly run by the Council. It was taken over by the MMTB in 1920.

Duncan resumed private practice whilst the network was under construction, and resigned from his position with the MTT in March 1892, although he remained a consultant to both the MTT and MTOC. He shortly thereafter sailed for Europe and America, being honoured in London by being elected a Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers for his efforts on the Melbourne cable tramway system. On his return to Australia, he recommended to the Brisbane municipal authority against the construction of cable tramways, instead opting for electric traction.

From 1894 he was active in the field of mining engineering, introducing into Victoria the cyanide process for extracting gold from ore and mine tailings. The firm of Duncan, Noyes & Co, of which he was the principal, was recognised as having enormous expertise in this field. His younger brother Alfred, his son and other members of the family also worked for the firm.

Later in life he became interested in extracting gold from seawater, and achieved this goal in 1912 from the waters of Port Phillip Bay, although at great expense. He persisted in pursuing in the goal of reducing the cost of this process until shortly before his death, but was unsuccessful in achieving this aim.

Duncan was of a modest and reserved manner, but well known by family and friends as having an affectionate and generous nature. True to the stereotype of engineers of Scots ancestry, he brought tremendous ability, focus and concentration to his work, which also showed in his passionate addiction to the Scottish national game of golf.

George Smith Duncan died in 1930. Nobody else had built so large a cable tramway system as an integrated network, and brought it to a peak of such efficiency. If he had published a book on the construction and operation of cable tramways, it would have been the standard reference work. However, by the time he had the time to do so, cable tramways were already obsolete, and he was ever a man who looked to the future.

### Bibliography

Keating, John D. (1970) *Mind the Curve!* Melbourne University Press



*Four trams in Hawthorn Depot, January 1965*

### Historic Photos by Bob Wilson

Enjoy the four photos on this page, taken by noted tram enthusiast Bob Wilson

### Stop Press

The Committee is investigating the production of new postcards and a museum guide for sale and to promote the existence of the Melbourne Tram Museum @ Hawthorn Depot. If we proceed, the

postcards will be produced through a small production run by a specialised printer. We are also pursuing the production of a small museum guide book and a matching book covering an introduction to the history of Melbourne's tramway system.



*W3 at Batman Avenue terminus, October 1964*



*L102 at Brunswick Depot, March 1977*



*L102 at South Melbourne Beach terminus, March 1977*