

The Brisbane Tramways

A Brief History with Conversion Notes.

by K.S. KINGS. ©

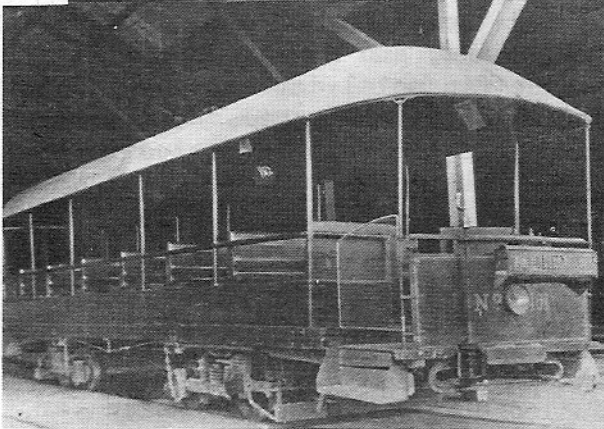
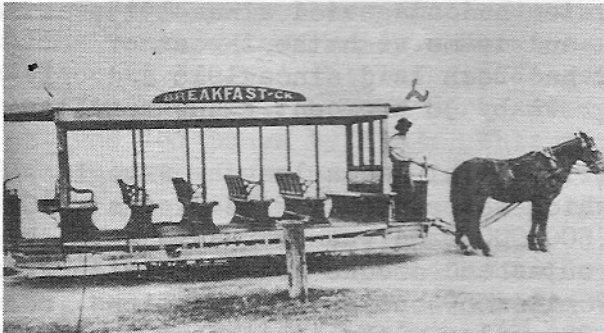
The writers first visit to Brisbane was in December, 1950, since when several subsequent visits have been made. These trips have enabled a quantity of information to be accumulated on the history and operations of the Brisbane City Council Transport Department and its predecessors, some of which is used in the following notes.

COMPANY DAYS.

The Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Co. Ltd. was formed in 1883 under "The Tramways Act of 1882". The Municipal Council and the State Government agreed in 1884 to the construction of 6½ miles of horse tramway from Woolloongabba to Breakfast Creek with branch lines to the Exhibition and New Farm. The service opened on 10th. August, 1885, with 18 trams available and 2 more on order. The double deck cars seated 40 passengers with fare collection by a conductor, while the single deckers seated 16 passengers and fares were placed in a fare box. The trams were built by the well known U. S. firms of Stephenson & Co. of New York and J.G. Brill of Philadelphia.

A connecting track across the Victoria bridge was opened on 30th. April, 1886, and enabled a through service to be operated. Wagonettes commenced to run as "feeders" to the trams at Breakfast Creek Bridge from Hamilton in February, 1886, and the Company purchased some bus lines and operated their vehicles on other "feeder" services. Authority was granted during 1886 and 1887 to construct lines to Bulimba Ferry and West End (Vulture Street), while battery cars were seriously considered in the latter year.

The original Company was always in poor financial condition, and it eventually sold its undertaking to the Brisbane Tramways Company Ltd., which had been formed in London in November, 1895. A contract to electrify the routes was promptly placed, and some of the equipment came from the General Electric Co. of U. S. A., which firm sent Mr. J.S. Badger to Brisbane to supervise its work. He was appointed Manager for the B. T. Co. in 1897 and subsequently General Manager and Managing Director. He remained thus during the existence of the Company, and returned to America in 1923. The work progressed quite rapidly, and the official opening took place on 21st. June, 1897. Mr. Badger drove the



Photos

V.W. Garner & T.M.S.V. archives.

TOP—Horse drawn tram enroute to Breakfast Creek, 1885/86.

CENTRE—Wagonettes were used as 'feeders' to the trams.

LOWER—Special Dreadnought No. 101.
Note roof construction.

first car, and Mr. (later Sir) Harold Clapp, the Chief Driving Instructor, was on the platform with him. Service commenced on 3rd. July. with 20 trams running on 15 miles of track.

PUBLIC CONTROL.

The early rolling stock was of the open combination and open cross bench designs, carried on single trucks. Later, double truck open cross bench motor and trailer cars were commissioned, while the unique "Dreadnought" design of bogie end loading saloon with nearly open sides evolved. During the 1910's, there was agitation for the State Government to take over the tramways, and this eventually happened on 1st. January, 1923. The Brisbane Tramways Trust was created, and inherited 181 electric trams and 70½ miles of tracks (42½ miles of route). The system had stagnated since 1915, as the Company was reluctant to spend money on new track and trams with the threat of acquisition ever at hand. Only 2¼ miles of track had been laid since 1915 and only 8 new trams built after 1917, while traffic had grown by 38 per cent, thus resulting in overcrowding even in "off-peak" periods.

The Trust not only inherited these practical problems, but had a lengthy wrangle with the Company about the amount of purchase price, which was eventually settled at £1,400,000. A loan was floated in London for £1,500,000--and was over-subscribed by £4,000,000!! The Trust tackled its problems of routes and tracks and trams with great energy, and, by 30th. November, 1925, had built 7 miles 59 chains of extensions, relaid 14¼ miles of track, duplicated 5¾ miles, treated 29½ miles with bitumen and tar surface, 18½ miles with asphalt, laid 12½ miles in concrete, and constructed 44 new trams. Of the latter, 21 were "Dreadnoughts", 5 open cross bench cars, and the remainder to a new design referred to as "Drop Centre" cars. Many improvements to existing rolling stock were made, and a motor truck was commissioned as a breakdown vehicle. Contracts were let for the Milton Workshops (to replace the old Countess Street Workshops), Ipswich Road Car Depot (to replace 2 small sheds), and 3 sub-stations, but a major decision was deferred on power supply although the existing generating plant was obsolete and inefficient (though the ingenuity of the staff raised its capacity 30 per cent and reduced the cost by ½d. per unit).

Following the passing of the "The Greater Brisbane Act" by parliament on 30th. October, 1924, the Brisbane City Council took over the tramway system on 1st. December, 1925, when the Trust's three-year term expired. A Transport Committee was appointed to run the service, which became a Department of the Council. They inherited 50¼ route miles (85½ miles of single track), and continued the policy of expansion. Many new routes were built, duplications and relays carried out, and new trams built, although there was a lull in these activities during the financial depression. The Trust had ordered 3 elevated interlocked signal boxes, and the Council added more and also installed many automatic point shifters at junctions, as well as protecting single line sections with automatic colour light signals. A new car shed replaced the small, old, shed at Light Street in 1931, and extensions were made to the sheds at Ipswich Road and Paddington.

Limited use was made of one-man operation during the depression by the conversion of "Dreadnought" cars. The year 1938 saw the last "Drop Centre" tram built and the commissioning of a new design of tram--the "400" or "four motor" class. The trucks were M. & M. T. B. No. 15 type, and later cars also featured trolleybases and control equipment from Melbourne. Heavy loadings were handled during the second World War, and the retirement of old cars was halted for several years. Tram No. 497 entered service in 1949 with resilient wheels and thus became the first Australian tram so equipped. The late 1940's and early 1950's was a period of progress for Brisbane, coupled with a neat publicity campaign. Tram interiors were improved, particularly new construction, and many sound-reducing features adopted--and the public advised by notices placed in the trams.

The peak year for passenger traffic was 1944-45 with 159,678,738 journeys, with

maximum car miles run in the same year of 10,326,871 miles. The greatest number of passenger cars reached was 428 in 1949-50. In 1962, 31 trams (in the "500" numbers) were fitted with resilient wheels, 44 had double helical gears, and 17 had roller bearings fitted in the axle boxes. Construction of new trams continued until 1955. 3 partly finished trams were not completed until 1959-60, while the 8 "Phoenix" trams entered service in 1963-64. The last extension was to Mt. Gravatt in 1951, subsequent to which track work was confined to minor modifications plus much relaying, into the middle 1960's.

MOTOR BUSES.

The trust ordered 11 motor buses in 1925, and 3 pioneer routes opened during 1925-26. There were many problems involved, including bad roads and heavy maintenance costs, and the venture lost money. Services ceased after 2 years, and the buses were sold. The Council entered the bus field again on 5th. July, 1940, and 13 vehicles were placed in service. 6 more were added in 1946, another 16 the next year, while the fleet was 181 buses by 1952. This rapid increase in the late 1940's was due to the Council taking over many private services. A steady increase took place during the 1950's, and the fleet stood at 240 by 1960. At 1st. April, 1966, there were 287 buses available for service, with 20 stored (and 28 others had been sold). Another 16 were received from a then current order, while subsequent orders have been for 381 more buses, and will be completed during September, 1969.

TROLLEY BUSES.

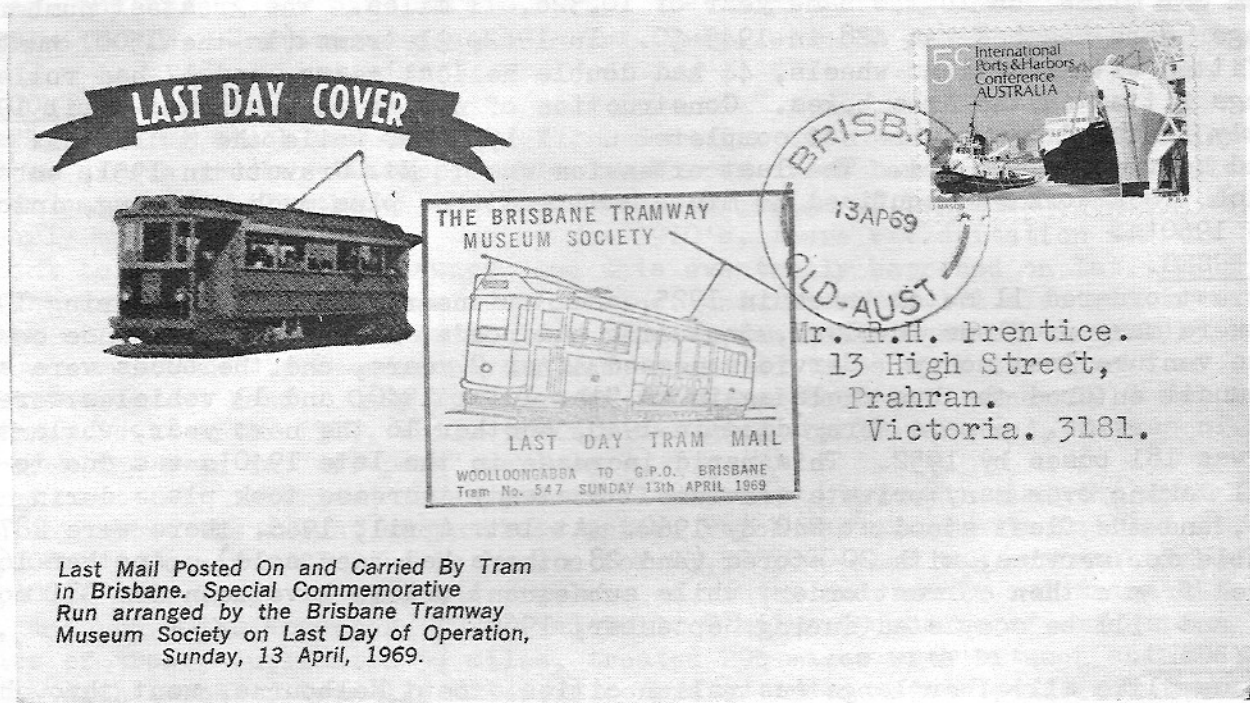
Brisbane, like all other large Australian cities except Melbourne, went through a period of "trolleybus enthusiasm". The first service commenced on 12th. August, 1951, after many post-war delays. 30 trolleybuses were ordered for a service to St. Lucia - which suburb has yet to see these vehicles! 4 other routes opened during the middle 1950's, and 6 more trolleybuses entered service during 1959-1960.

CONVERSION.

It is difficult to say exactly when the decline of the Brisbane tramway system began. Possibly the controversial closure of the Cavendish Road route on 13th. November, 1955, could be selected, but it is more likely that the conflagration at Paddington tram depot on Friday evening, 28th. September, 1962, when the depot and 65 trams were destroyed, was the turning point. The B.C.C. had requested a special report from its Transport Department earlier in the year on the future of street transport in Brisbane. The surviving 301 tramcars could not cope with the peak requirement of 296 trams for the system. Some B.C.C. buses were pressed into service on tram routes, and 15 buses (31 seat, single deck, A.E.C.), were hired at \$40.00 per each per week from Sydney. Subsequently, 4 tram routes were changed to buses on 24th. December, 1962, apparently to relieve pressure on the tram fleet, although no official announcement was made. 8 new trams were built from salvaged parts or stock-in-hand during 1963-1964.

The B.C.C. ordered 114 Leyland "Panther" rear-engine bus chassis in June, 1966, a further 90 in September, and another 136 in July, 1967. The 204 bodies for the 2 former groups were built by Athol Hedges and the 136 for the latter by A.B. Denning. This would probably be the most concentrated ordering of buses in Australia outside of Sydney's D.G.T. No official announcement was made of the findings of the B.C.C. Transport Department's inquiry or of the proposed conversion of the tramway system to buses, and the news became public subsequent to a related remark by the Lord Mayor in a radio interview on 28th. April, 1968, and an editorial in the Tramway Union magazine. The first 2 routes closed on 5th. August, 1968, and resulted in a strike, as the Union refused to one-man operate the replacing buses. The Union failed, but did arrange a redundancy agreement, and the buses started running 23 days later. December 1st. saw the closure of 4 more routes, and the result was the withdrawal of all trams from Adelaide Street, City.

The trolleybus services were withdrawn between 29th. November, 1968 and 13th. March, 1969 (15 days earlier than originally announced). The remaining 13 tram routes via



Last Mail Posted On and Carried By Tram in Brisbane. Special Commemorative Run arranged by the Brisbane Tramway Museum Society on Last Day of Operation, Sunday, 13 April, 1969.



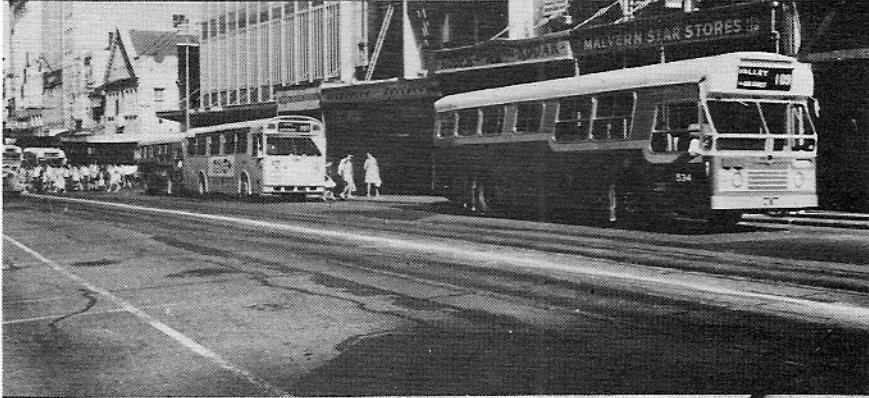
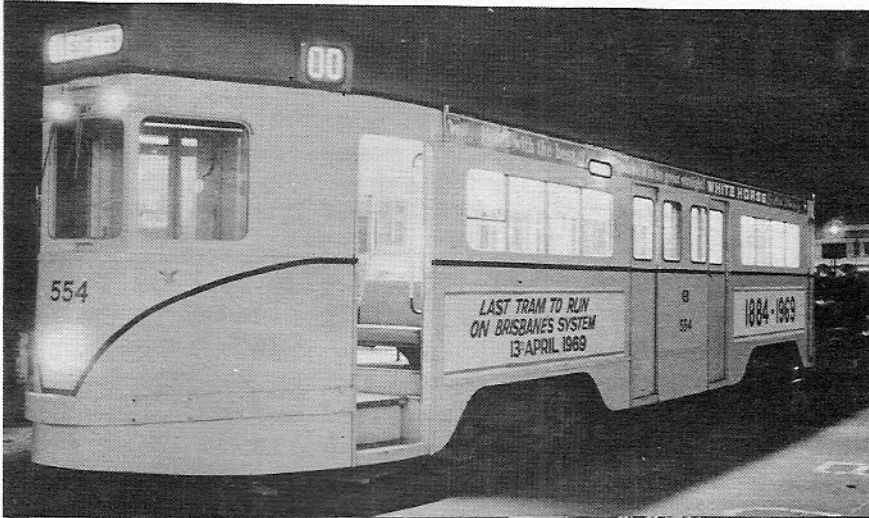
Queen Street, City, closed on Sunday, 13th. April, 1969, and the 113 surviving tramcars scrapped or sold. During the last few days, many trams were hired as "Last Tram Ride" specials by a multitude of groups ranging from Church organisations to political groups! Some were well behaved, some quiet, some hilarious, and the seemingly inevitable few objectionable and rough. The Council issued special Souvenir tickets (see samples left) at 20 cents each for one return trip on any route on the last day, and many thousands were sold. Passenger riding appeared to be up on the second last day (Saturday), and the loads carried on the Sunday looked like peak-hour! From soon after the services commenced right through into the middle of the evening nearly every tram carried at least a few standing passengers, and most of the time it was difficult to board or alight from the cars. It was

remarked that: "Clem Jones should close his tramways more often!" The normal Sunday service of a maximum of 19 tramcars was supplemented by several extra cars, but more could not be run due to the non-availability of staff. Many applications to charter trams could not be met for this reason, and the traffic crews must have collected quite an appreciable sum in overtime in the month before the closure.

Some youthful passengers had caused some trouble on a couple of the trams on Satur-

PHOTOS

K. S. Kings.



TOP The last tram built for Brisbane, No. 554 (and, to date, the last tram built in Australia), decorated for the official last run. On Warner St. loop, Valley. The year 1884 appears to be wrong. Sunday night, 13-4-69.

CENTRE "The morning after...." "....the almost total absence of other motor traffic." Queen St., looking south over corner Edward St., 8.30 a.m., Monday, 14-4-69.

LOWER. "Drop Centre" 231 (the prototype), ready to leave Milton Workshops for the Brisbane Tramway Museum Society site at Ferny Grove, late on Monday morning, 14-4-69, still with farewell signs from its special trip on Saturday, 12-4-69, with retired tramwaymen. 553 (and 552, hidden) await despatch to a retarded children's home.

day night, but it was nothing to what happened on the last night. Police were called to Queen Street between George St. and North Quay shortly before 8.30 p.m., and 2 motor cycles raced past Edward St. with their sirens screaming, and several mobile cars converged from other directions. There was a gap in the south-bound trams at this time, and bus 376 followed at 8.33 showing "City"; the reason

is not known. During the evening most trams suffered moderate damage, and at least 2 were badly treated, one of which had the interior wrecked.

The last tram to run in normal passenger service became No. 534, from Ascot-Oriel Park, and it arrived back at Ipswich Road Depot at about 11.45 p.m. It had been followed down Queen Street by the last tram built for Brisbane, No. 554, which had carried the official party. No. 554 had then turned along George Street to go to Milton Workshops.

No. 554 had naturally not suffered any damage from the hooligans who were abroad that night, as it was under police escort the whole time. No. 534 was also intact, but for a different reason. The "enthusiasts" had calculated which would be the last tram back to Ipswich Road Depot, and had boarded it at various times during the evening. It eventually became largely a "special"! All those involved knew that the

B. C. C. had been forced to place security guards at Ipswich Road Depot and gleaned that anyone caught "souveniring" would be in trouble, and would be disowned by the Societies. Accordingly, 534 had a very peaceful evening because about half its passengers were determined to see that nothing happened to spoil them travelling on Brisbane's last passenger tram in normal service! Admittedly, a policeman rode on the front step towards the end, but the majority of the damage to other trams had been inflicted before this hour.

"THE MORNING AFTER...."

Brisbane was an "All-bus" city the next morning. Most of the vehicles used on the ex-tram routes were the new "Blue" buses, with sensitised rubber edges to their doors, which allows the rear doors to be used under the one-man operation. Quite a few of the older buses were used on the Queen Street routes, the lowest number sighted being 110 (these vehicles using only the front door). The many buses used seemed to flow along Queen Street quite well, but the most noticeable point was the almost total absence of other motor traffic. An evening paper photograph showed 12 buses and only 15 motor cars in Queen Street between Edward and George Streets at 8.30 a.m. on Monday, 14th. April, while 3 photographs which I took show a corresponding situation. Previously, motor traffic was heavy to "hopeless"! Official reports state that traffic flows better and journey times are about the same or better, whereas private reports state that journey times are from slightly worse to half as long again (due to the one-man operation) even though about 20 per cent of the tram stops have been eliminated under the bus routes conversion.

And so ended nearly 72 years of electric tramway operation in Brisbane, which had been preceded by nearly 12 years of horse trams, giving Brisbane a total of just over 83½ years of tramway operation. But just as the last 8 trams built for Brisbane were styled "Phoenix" cars (they were said to have risen from the ashes of Paddington Depot, as some salvaged parts were used), another "phoenix" has arisen in Brisbane. From a city where one could previously never find more than 3 or 4 people actively interested in tramways, the Brisbane Tramway Museum Society has had a meteoric rise since its inaugural meeting 17th. July, 1968. It now has about 50 members, has found and rented a site while negotiating for its purchase on a long-term basis, is negotiating for about one-and-a-half miles of former railway right of way, has received on Trust from the B. C. C. a total of 20 tramcars, 2 trolleybuses and 1 diesel bus, and is receiving an exceptionally high degree of assistance from the staff of the Transport Department in all matters appertaining to the museum project. While the closure of the Brisbane tramway system removed a very efficient and interesting undertaking from this country, it has obviously stimulated the dormant interest of many people in the subject, with the result that a small oasis is being created to perpetuate the once flourishing "Brisbane Tramways".

Best wishes to the B. T. M. S. !