

Don't Waste the Paint By Noel West

The majority of the FM class trams carried a sign mounted above each Motorman's door stipulating some conditions that must be observed by passengers while travelling in the tram. Requests were accompanied with a "please" but offences could incur a fine of £50 and the regulations were authorised by the Transport Department's Manager. Surprisingly this mundane item has an interesting story that has been revealed below the visible layer of paint.



Second design of the sign until replaced in 1966

After the system closed in April 1969 the museum obtained quite few of the above signs and an inspection of twenty-two of the signs revealed that all but one showed the name of Mr. D. Macnaughton as the Manager at the time of the closure. However there was a variety of styles of how his name was applied to the sign. It would seem that a number of sign-writers had a hand in obliterating the previous manager's name with red paint then applying Mr. Macnaughton's name.



Two versions of sign-written name

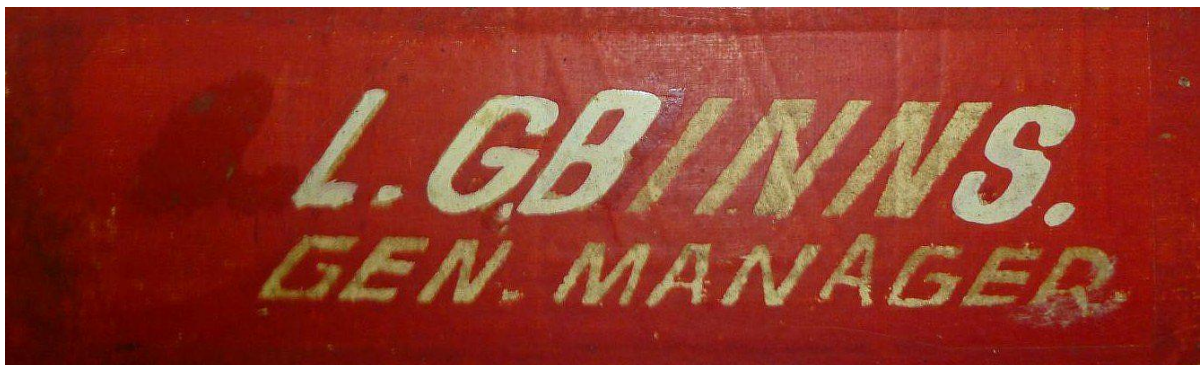
Perhaps the latter name was considered a bit long for one astute sign-writer who may have suggested to his boss that the name be printed on a piece of adhesive paper and simply stuck over the previous manager's name, no red or white paint required and the job finished in quick

time. Depot staff could perform the task possibly saving a workshop visit or the sign-writers having to go to the depots. One hopes he got a few bob for his suggestion.



Printed paper version of name

The origin of this article starts with the observation that the one sign that did not bear Mr. Macnaughton's name bore the name of L.G. Binns as the General Manager. It appears that it previously had a paper label of Macnaughton's name but at sometime it was removed. Close observation shows some ingenuity in the application of Binns' name. A (but not his immediate) predecessor was Mr. S. L. Quinn. It is obvious that the S. has been painted out, the L. has been refreshed, the Q and U morphed into a G and B and an S. added; leaving the INN and Gen. Manager untouched. On another sign with a paper label the latter was removed to reveal a different version of Binns' name, fully, if not a bit crudely, redone from Quinn's name but with Gen. deleted.



The quick and paint saving version of changing S.L.Quinn to L.G.Binns and leaving Gen.



Another version of the name change and deletion of Gen.

Not only was there some economy in the use of paint but of the sign panels themselves. Most are made from 3/16 inch (5mm) three ply while some of the later ones were made from Masonite. Some examples of the early panels reveal that they were not always painted as shown above.

One can very clearly discern in large lettering just the wording "Have your WEEKLY OR CON-CESSION TICKET ready please" or "Have the CORRECT FARE READY please" under the final paintwork so the signage was altered at some stage to include the two red advisory panels and Mr. Quinn's name.

Another interesting thing about the panels is that when they were introduced they featured images of either a conductor or conductress on the left hand side of the text.

Just when the panels first appeared is not known but it would seem the conductor appeared first. To see what he looked like some partial sanding back of a panel revealed a man happy to take your money.



Original version of conductor's image

During WW11 over three hundred women were hired to become conductresses so at some stage an image of a conductress was chosen to replace that of the male. As new trams were being built during the war the conductress's image was first to appear on the newly made panels.



Image of conductress. Note the shape of paper used to reapply the image of the conductor over the conductress post

At some stage after the war the decision was made to revert to the conductor's image. His image was produced on some specially shaped pieces of paper and glued over the conductress's image. That paper shape is still evident on several of the signs. When the final design of the sign was made the new artwork was simply applied over the old.

Further sanding back of the same sign revealed that they originally had a white back-ground. All the text was in a dark blue (as shown on the conductor's image) and the capitalized letters were outlined in the light blue. A "tanned skin" colour was applied on the conductor's face and fingers as well as a flourish on either side of the conductors light blue background. The conductress's image shows details of their brown uniform. The text and images were applied using the silk screen process. Different screens were made for the position and layered application of the various colours. The FM class trams that did not carry the above signage were those fitted with the pairs of convex conductors' mirrors that occupied the space above the motorman's doors.

The essential details of the signs were displayed in ceiling advertising panels. However the original signs did not last until the end of the tramway era. It will be noted that the fine is shown in pre-decimal currency. It was the introduction of decimal currency in February 1966 that was the catalyst for change.

The signs were also becoming faded and tatty as shown by the inconsistent application of Mr. Macnaughton's name.

Totally new signs of the same shape were made to replace the old ones. The new signage, printed by a more modern process, featured a dark green background with essentially the same text appearing in white or yellow in an updated layout.

As the old signs were replaced they were put into storage and probably forgotten, until discovered by Society members when permission was granted, post closure, to recover items of their interest from the workshops.

Another interesting aspect regarding the signs concerns the Transport Managers themselves. The signs were introduced during the time Mr. Quinn was manager. Mr. Quinn had been Deputy Manager under his predecessor Mr. G. Steer. Both men commenced their tramway careers with the advent of the Brisbane Tramways Trust having come from Queensland Railways. With Mr. Steer's retirement looming the Council appointed Mr. Quinn as his successor in November 1938 with a £1500 salary and seven year term. The changeover took effect from 14th February 1939.

Mr. Quinn's tenure as General Manager well exceeded his original seven years until he retired on 31st December 1953. However the appointment of his successor became a lengthy process. By 1948 the Deputy Manager was Mr. R. J. H. Risson, an extremely capable man who acted as manager when Mr. Quinn took leave, and it was presumed he would replace Mr. Quinn when he retired in December 1952. However Mr. Risson saw an opportunity interstate and in June 1949 the Victorian Government announced him as the new Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board. While the Council did have some time applications were advertised for the position in 1952 without success, so Mr. Quinn was requested to stay another year to retire at age 66 years.

In February 1953 Mr. G. A. Preston was appointed to the role of Assistant Manager in preparation for him to be Mr. Quinn's successor. He duly became Manager in January 1954 with the adjectival term General being deleted. Considering he held the job for well over four years one could reasonably expect that Mr. Preston's name would have replaced that of Mr. Quinn on the fore-mentioned signage, but the evidence above would indicate otherwise.

The Lord Mayor announced on 22nd May 1958 that a letter of dismissal, giving him three months notice, had been sent to Mr. Preston. This controversial action was allegedly the finding of the Establishment and Co-ordination Committee that Mr. Preston "lacks the degree of managerial skill necessary for the successful management of the transport undertaking". The action was severely criticised by the opposition and the Tramways Union. On 31st May the Manager's position was advertised worldwide with applications to close on 18th July. A week before the closing date 34 applications had been received only one of which was from a council officer.

On the 18th June Mr. Preston was ordered to leave immediately and was paid in lieu of notice with accrued long service leave. Mr. G.W. Barlow was seconded from the Works Department as Acting Manager. It was also revealed that Mr. Preston had not been happy with some findings that consultants W.D. Scott and Co. had produced regarding the Transport Department. Mr. Preston appealed against his dismissal but over the following months the city administration did all in its power in the courts to prevent an appeal being heard.

On 15th December 1958 the City Council Appeal Board announced that Mr. Preston had withdrawn his appeal. A negotiated settlement included an unspecified payment and a statement from Council that the dismissal "involved no reflection upon the character and administrative ability" of Mr. Preston.

At the same time the Council announced that former army Brigadier L. G. Binns would become the new Transport Manager from January 1959. Until that time all managers had been appointed from City Council personnel. As we have seen Binns' name was applied to the signs.

If Preston's exit was controversial so too was Binns' but this time it was very quick. Binns resigned on 18th August 1961. He revealed in a later interview that the Transport Department was subjected to undue direction by aldermen and the Town Clerk. Apparently strong personal opinions of some senior aldermen had restricted managerial initiative for the past two years. On 8th September 1961 it was announced that 56 year old Mr. D. R. MacNaughton from the Electricity Department had been appointed as the new Traffic Manager.

Further research may find the answer but at this point in time it is a mystery why Mr. Preston's name was not applied to the signs. The Council may have been flaunting some law or bylaw by not having the signs updated and leaving the name of a person who had nothing to do with the Council for five years! At least it saved some paint.

This article had only been intended as a humorous paragraph to demonstrate the ingenuity of one unknown sign-writer to adapt one name into another with minimum effort and paint. It was only when looking for a date for what seemed to be a Quinn to Binns changeover that I literally "scratched the surface" to discover the story of a simple piece of plywood and paintwork.

Details of the Traffic Managers have been sourced from various copies of The Courier Mail and Electric Traction magazine. Thanks to Robert Thomson for his input. Photos by the author.