

## **A Tram Journey from Newmarket to the City in the 1930s by Owen C. Robinson.**

*Prior to 1949 the terminus for the Enogerra line was at Newmarket. Owen Robinson remembers catching a tram from the Newmarket terminus in the 1930s. This is his recollections of those times. The museum has only been unable to find one photo of the Newmarket line in the 1930s to go with this article.*

### The Early 1930's Suburban Family Scene

Before our tram journey begins, we must take some time to try to picture the life style of families as I saw them in that period of my childhood.

### The Depression

It was several years since the Great World Depression had burst on to the globe, and from this time of extreme hardship for many, there seemed to be a calm acceptance of the situation by all. The sight of unemployed men looking for work was commonplace, and our family was lucky to have a father in permanent work. He was a P.M.G. Electrician. For those not so fortunate men unemployed with no hope of a job, the Government provided "Relief Payment" for labouring work performed in many districts, with pick and shovel. These men were called "Relief Workers" and was a common sight working on the dirt roads and streets in every suburb. Educated or not, they were all in the same "gang" and as a little boy not yet of school age, I spent a lot of time watching and talking to them. They were my friends. A horse drawn "Dray" (large cart) would accompany the Relief Workers as a vehicle for transporting their tools and removing all earthwork materials. A "ganger" would be in charge, it was dirty monotonous work.

### Everyday Street Scene

The milkman and postman delivered twice daily. Bakers delivered bread 5 days per week. An Iceman came several times per week, if you had an Ice Chest. The Sanitary Man (Dunny Man) came weekly in the dark hours by motor truck. He carried those big black metal sanitary pans (Hatboxes) in with some sawdust, and exchanged them for used ones in our back yard lavatories(thunder boxes). Hard dirty work.

The garbage man (rubbish man) came weekly with a very large high sided horse drawn cart. He carried out the rubbish in a large metal bin slung on his shoulder over a leather pad attached to his body. Tough work.

A man with horse and cart came around frequently selling clothes Props. Another regular was the bottle man, yelling out "Bags or Bottles". He did not pay much for either, but he kept coming.

A hairdresser-barber came frequently on Saturdays in a little car painted white and red and cut peoples hair in their homes.

A musician out of work came into our street frequently, playing his silver cornet. Mum would give him a silver coin, threepence or sixpence, and he would play our favourite tunes.

An icecream man came every Saturday afternoon in a small horse drawn cart; his name was "Janey". The icecream was different to Peters and Pauls, and he served it in a square cone and

put some red coloured syrup on top. I don't know how he kept it hard. He had to lift up bags to serve it

The Alderley Council Depot had a Steam Roller, and it was a thrilling sight to see it working in our streets. Some motor trucks were still equipped with solid rubber tyres on steel wheels, and horse drawn transport was popular. Sulkies, Drays, Carts were used by locals for personal travel or industry. There were two sulkies in our street.

### Entertainment

Even though money was short there were always low cost outings to be enjoyed. Train journeys to Sandgate on the beach buses to Cribb Island, tram ride to the Botanical Gardens in the City to see the animals, or a day at the museum. With a 5 ½ day working week, nothing started until Saturday afternoon. There were no organised sporting activities for children, only at school.

Local kids played all sorts of games in the open paddocks close to home, usually within sight and earshot of residents. Cowboys and Indians, soldiers, making and flying kites, and playing marbles in the street were all part of kids entertainment, parents did not entertain children in those days. Nobody was bored.

Most family entertainment was local, the picture theatre, school of arts, memorial hall for dances and men played billiards in the backroom - definitely no children allowed in. Three tennis courts in our area were well patronised. Movie programmes those days were long, and gave you first a newsreel, then a cartoon, maybe a short feature like "Crime doesn't pay" then the first full length movie. After interval, you watched the main movie. Three types of seating were offered priced downwards from the canvas chairs. Tip ups (like the present theatres only plain leather), and the wooden garden type long chairs, known as the "bum breakers". Every family member had an overcoat to wear to these events, as they walked home on a winter's night.

### Transport

Transport was adequate and cheap, but the cheapest of all was walking. People walked and talked wherever they went. They exchanged stories of local events, we all felt safe. Sergeant Creedy of the Newmarket police Station was a legend in his treatment of petty crime. I think his district stretched from Kelvin Grove to Everton Park and Bunya.

Our neighbour used to put his boy in a "billy cart" and walk into Roma Street markets on Sunday morning to buy cheap produce and food, what a journey there and back. Whatever the reason, a trip to town by tram, bus or train was a boy's delight and never did I say to mum, "when are we getting there?"

Let's go by tram today.

### Green Hill Alderley

Our nearest tram from the family home at Edith Street, Alderley, the area once known as Green Hill was at Newmarket at the corner of Enoggera Road and Banks Street, on the present site of McDonalds Restaurant. It was a long tiring walk over the hill to the terminus, but a feeder bus service relieved us of this some years later by picking up passengers at most street corners in the Green Hill area. It was a small British Bedford Bus and struggled mightily to ascend the steep Banks Street hill with a full load of shoppers and school kids on the afternoon run.



Dreadnought 177 at Newmarket Tram Terminus with Tom Gardiners Bodyworks in the background.

#### The Newmarket Tram Terminus

Once at the terminus I would hope a tram would not be there immediately so that I could explore everything happening at this busy centre. The corner shop emitted lovely smells of confectionery, soft drinks being opened, and ice creams being served from the refrigerator. In those days refrigerators were only seen in shops. Another interesting shop was Kroll's Boot repairs, what a mixture of smells poured out as you walked by, or looked in to see the bootmaker working at those spinning brush wheels, polishing a finished shoe. Smells of leather boot polish, oils, spirits, sewing machines working and that horrible smell of the glue he used to put "Kromhyd" soles on leather shoes to make them last longer.

#### Tom Gardiners Bodyworks

The last building was Tom Gardiner's Motor body works, what a magic place for a boy's eyes. All the doors were open, and here you could see trucks, buses, delivery vans, or anything on wheels receive their handmade wood and metal bodies. Smells of paints, oils, grease, timbers of all sorts, glues, machinery exhausts, drilling machines, using oil that burnt with a pungent smell, never forgotten. A general smell of manufacturing with noises of hammers, saws, and flashes of welding, which looked a bit frightening like small lightning strikes in a storm. The last open bay was the Paint Shop, where you might see a man spray painting a vehicle with Duco, not an unpleasant smell from a distance.

Many of the trucks in those days did not have fully enclosed steel cabins. Their wooden cabins were built on trucks, supplied as "Cowl and Chassis" only, that is a vehicle with only a front windscreen, and steering wheel etc. These wooden cabins had no doors. They were cheaper and actually preferred by many drivers for quick access when making deliveries. However their fresh air coolness in summer, was offset by trying to keep dry in wet weather. The finished

trucks once given their bodies, cabins and seats would be attractively painted to customer's specifications, with some very fancy lettering and designs. Perhaps you might see the signwriter applying these names with his dextrous hands making all those swirls, lines, arrows and lettering demanded by tradespeople to have their trucks advertising their products and services to the public. Baker's trucks were a classic example of this. McDougalls and Bedgoods Bread vans were attractively painted and did they smell good when the back door opened near your house.

Here comes our tram.

From Ashgrove Avenue Kelvin Grove a single tramline came up the low hill to Newmarket. Seeing it coming was a sign to stay with Mum to get aboard. Stopping at the end of the line, passengers from the city alighted, whilst the tram crew changed ends and reattached the big pole on the roof to the overhead electric wire. A few sparks and flashes might be seen with a resulting cracking sound if the conductor missed the wire with the pole on the rope.

### The Tram and Staff

The smell of enamel painted wooden seats blending with the natural smell of people and their various types of freshly laundered clothing all added to the persona of the tram. A man smoking a cigar in the back cabin was a nice smell to me from that distance.

We recognised many tramway staff and had our favourites. Will Reg be on today? Our ex-milkman, who was lucky to get a new job as a conductor in those hard times.

Mum preferred inside the front cabin, facing the direction of travel, and gave me the window seat. The Conductor rings the bell, we are off. Fares please as he hits his ticket clicker on the metal handles of the seats to attract attention. I liked to watch the motorman at the controls, one hand winding a large brass brake handle and the other on the electric control.

Down the road on the left was Cec. Watts Regent Cycle Works. One day I might get one of those beaut bikes on display outside. A furniture factory on the right just past Gibson's Plumbing was worth a quick glance as we approached the Newmarket Road Intersection with Wedmaier's Service Station on one corner and the Hotel opposite.

### Newmarket to Kelvin Grove

The service station always attracted my attention, as motorcars were few and only owned by the well off families, or tradespeople. I loved the sight of petrol being hand pumped up into those glass tanks on top of the bowsers. Different coloured petrols with pretty bubbles bursting as the number of gallons reached the allotted level. Shell, Super Plume Ethyl(Mobil) and Purr Pull.

The Hotel did not have any interest for me. Hotels were mainly patronised by men, as any local woman seen going into an hotel, would be frowned on by her peers. My father and many of our relatives and neighbours did not drink because they could not afford it. Alcohol - was never on our table even at Christmas. We were not "wowsers" or deeply religious folk, but a temperate lifestyle was a strong family value of the time.

Social behaviour was disciplined and self regulated, particularly when you were in public places. Older folk set the standard and the children followed suit or else.

From the Kelvin Grove School of Arts Building on the right at the corner of Ashgrove Avenue the double tramline started, and we would see the tram from the city there waiting for us to pass. Up the hill, past the Catholic Church on the right, the tram then went down to the bridge across Breakfast Creek. At that point you get bombarded by two nasty smells coming from the left across the creek.

At Bishop Street Kelvin Grove, there were two industries pouring out those smells continuously. One was Johnson's Tannery giving off a putrid smell from the processing of animal skins and hides into leather of all sorts. The other was the N.A.R.M. Rubber Works (North Australian Rubber Mills) which competed with the tannery for the most foul odour. That smell naturally was like burning rubber. NARM's top product in those days may have been sandshoes, the poor man's footwear, and no thongs in those days.

#### Kelvin Grove to Prospect Terrace

Leaving the bad smells behind, the tram climbed up Long Hill Kelvin Grove to the Prospect Terrace Shopping centre on the left. There was a picture theatre and many shops at this busy road junction, and a tramways staff shed in a small park on the right. Moving down the hill with open paddocks on the left and a group of large trees on the right, you spotted the steam coming out of Bishop's Steam Laundry opposite. No bad smells here. At the top of the hill I always hoped to see some soldiers at the Kelvin Grove Army Depot, but as it was peacetime, there was little activity on weekdays.

Down the hill and on the right was the first smells of the country, coming from Denham's Produce Store (Later the Qld Egg Board). Smells of all sorts of produce at the loading docks, where trucks and horse drawn wagons were being loaded with hay, lucerne, wheat, and corn, some in bales others in large bags.

#### Normanby to Roma Street

Leaving that stop at the Normanby Hotel on the right, sometimes you got the smell of the Normanby Cattle Yards over on the left on the railway line; another country smell. Ascending the short hill at the Fiveways there was always a Johnnie Walker Whisky sign on the left on top of the railway embankment. The tram soon started the descent down Countess Street with the Roma Street Railway Goods yard on the left. Hoping the tram had a long stop halfway down to the rail overbridge, so that I could see the steam locos shunting. Maybe might be lucky enough to see some wagons being pushed and let go down the track clanking heavy metal sound as they hit up against their intended destination. Coal fired boilers, steam coming off safety valves, great smells wafting across the yards

The tram always stopped at the intersection with Roma Street where the tramway staff changed over on their shifts. This I remember mainly on the return journey outbound with the offices then on the left. Cavanagh brothers had a coal transport depot behind the Tramways Office, and their green international trucks carrying coal and coke (not the drink) were always clean and spotless

Looking across from there you saw Carricks Furniture Factory, home of the famous "Mawson" Wooden Ice chests. International Harvester Company's Showroom over to the right. Alfa Laval, famous for milk and cream separators, had their headquarters in this area. Further up Roma Street there were several farm supply companies. The Red Comb Co-operative Poultry supply building opened here later on.

## Roma Street to George Street

Once again, the smells of the country abounded with all farm suppliers. Motor truck and horse drawn wagons would pass by the tram. A real treat was the sight of a pair of Clydesdale draught-horses doing this job. Their hooves covered partly in white hair, looking like socks, drummed out a rhythmic "clip clop" as they jogged along at a slow but steady pace.

## The Markets

After leaving the Roma Street Railway Station Stop and looking left before entering George Street, the Brisbane Markets could be seen surrounded by trucks, carts and vehicles of all sorts. Smells of fruit, vegetables, produce and live poultry mixed with the city traffic was a pleasant odour reminding us that this was where all our food and produce came from.

## George Street

George Street was the working people's part of the city, with such essential stores and services in one area. McKenzie's Shoe Store, Finlaysons, Carlile and Malouf, Abdy Brothers, Briggs, McDonnell and East, Carl Schultz Gunshop, BAFS chemist shop, Lyceum Theatre, Hotels, Manahan's grocery Store, Music Store, Butcher shop and many others. Unforgettable smells inside these shops, as each of these stores had their own smell, from the drapery stores with that clean cloth odour to the chemist shop, where all the medicines being hand prepared, made you feel you were inhaling a free dose of good health. Whilst Mum had to wait for these prescriptions to be made up, a little shopping could be done in George Street. Materials, cottons and patterns were available at moderate prices for the mother seeking to make clothing for the family. This was a great saving on the husband's wages, and kept everyone smartly attired.

After that, we would catch another tram to the city centre, or perhaps down to Fortitude Valley. If we finished our outing at the Valley it was not convenient to catch a Newmarket Tram home, as they left from St Pauls Tce, a long walk from the shopping centre.

We would catch a Mitchelton or Ferny Grove train from Brunswick Street Station to Alderley.

But that is another story

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