

By 1923 the then recently formed Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board had decided that a modern and centralised electric tramway workshop was essential to its future operations. Work was then scattered amongst Depots at Malvern, Hawthorn, Coburg, Essendon, Preston and Footscray, varying from quite minor to major operations. These locations were caused historically from the individual systems the Board had taken over. Further, the cable tram workshops were at North Fitzroy, and it had been decided to convert that system to electric trams whilst concurrently expanding the electric tram system. A 17 acre block of land at Preston was purchased running from St. Georges Road to the railway line and south from Oakover Road. Construction of buildings commenced in 1924. Northwards extensions were made to the three main buildings at the end of World War II, while four separate buildings were constructed in the northern yard from about 1950. Sundry minor alterations and modifications have been made to buildings, track and grounds from time to time.

Offices. This two storey structure houses management, administrative, draughting, production control and laboratory staff, as well as the Running Sheds Engineer and his immediate staff.

Mess Hall. This building is used for meals by staff, and includes a small canteen, with other areas devoted to the Printing Department, Photographer and Nursing Sister.

Store. The Preston Store houses all the items necessary to maintain the Melbourne tram fleet, plus many for other sections of the Board's undertaking. It is well laid out with stock bins and racks, as well as bulk areas and a loading dock with overhead crane.

Blacksmiths. This workshop houses the blacksmiths forges and hammers, plate shop, welding area, foundry and pattern making room. Tramcar frames were assembled in the jigs still mounted in the floor, while No. 15 truck frames were assembled nearby. The tramcar straightening bay is outside in the northern area of open land.

Engineering. This very large building actually houses three sections: machine shop, truck shop and electrical shop.

The machine shop is notable for rows of general and special purpose lathes, turning, grinding and milling machines. There are also many benches for fitters to work at the multitude of items that need hand finishing and assembly. Specific locations are set aside for brake valves, relay valves, governors, etc. The Tool Room is a wire enclosure containing the machines needed by the highly skilled tradesmen who work in this area to build and maintain the tools and jigs necessary for precision engineering work.

The truck shop basically assembles new and overhauled trucks. A special area was built for assembling the ASEA trucks, and it is now used for the Duwag trucks. Overhead cranes facilitate the transfer of materials throughout the length of the work area. Many improvements have been made to trucks and brake rigging over the years, especially in the last two decades and very impressive results are now being achieved.

The electrical shop is presently undergoing a substantial re-arrangement. It is, of course, concerned with the electrical equipment of the trams and, in the last few years, some of the electronic items. Some of the work on the electronic equipment of the Z series trams is performed in a separate air-conditioned work-room near the Paint Shop. The overhaul and rebuilding (and formerly building) of controllers, motors, contactor boxes, resistances, etc., are carried out in this area together with the rewinding of armatures and manufacture of wiring looms. A new testing room has recently been built, and a new electronics room and store are under construction.

Body Shop. This building is also very large and houses three sections.

The wood mill and joinery sections are at the south end of the building. They include various wood-working machines and benches for joinery work of various items. The timber stacks and main saw are outside to the west.

The lifting shop runs along the east side of the building, adjacent to the main traverser. A fifteen ton overhead travelling crane is ideal for lifting and lowering tramcar bodies. This takes place in connection with overhaul, accident repairs, and defective motors, or to receive a new tram body or despatch an old one.

The body shop fills the rest of this building. Trams receive overhauls, accident repairs, re-canvassed roofs or conversions. As well as bodymakers, there are men from other trades in this area - small groups from other shops either on a permanent or as required basis. As well as body items, electrical and air gear are removed and replaced while trams are in the body shop and lifting shop. Some painting is also done, especially that of a "touch up" nature.

Paint Shop. This is the smallest of the main buildings, and is to the west of the small traverser on the west side of the body shop. Trams which have been overhauled or repaired are washed down, primed if necessary, undercoated and final coated in this area. Monogram and numeral transfers are applied and signwriting affixed. Sundry tramcar and other items are painted and varnished and destination and route number curtains manufactured.

Northern Area. Four main buildings were erected north of the extended workshops from 1950.

Trimmers Shop. Upholstery for new and overhauled trams is carried out here, as well as repairs from the Running Sheds. Strap Hangers, Conductors Bags, Ticket Wallets, etc. are also handled.

Degreaser. This chemical cleaning plant mainly handles tramcar parts, especially truck components from tramcars under overhaul.

Sheetmetal Shop. Sheetmetal items are manufactured and repaired in this shop.

Amenities Block. This building houses washing, changing, locker and toilet facilities for the Engineering Building. Note the main columns on its southern side for any possible future extension from the main building.

The Test Tracks and Storage Area are to the north of the foregoing four buildings. The tracks are used to test overhauled and repaired trams as well as to commission the new Z series cars. The original test track is along the Oakover Road fence while the two lower tracks were built in 1953. The former has been used for storage in recent years. A new test track is being built along the railway line and access will be from the original test track.

Sundries. A new amenities block has recently been built on the south side of the paint shop to serve paint and body shop staff. The building branch have permanent accommodation for their maintenance staff south of the trimmers shop. A bulk store is situated south of the foundry, while the Preston (traction) sub-station is in the south east corner of the property adjacent to "the hump". The small brick building immediately north east of the office block is the workshops electrical sub-station, outside which is a standby diesel generator.

COBURG DEPOT.

Coburg Depot was built by the Melbourne, Brunswick and Coburg Tramways Trust to service the two electric tram routes it built to East and North Coburg. It was sited in Nicholson Street, Coburg, a few yards north of Moreland Road, which intersection was the junction of the two routes. It consisted of red-brick offices and amenities building and sub-station on the street frontage, with a five-road running shed behind and parallel to it. A small workshop area was also provided. Later another five-road car shed was built, but this was longer than the first shed.

The early 1950's saw operating economies instituted by the MMTB as post-war passenger figures declined and expenses rose. One event in this programme was the closure of Coburg Depot as a running shed on Saturday night 11th October, 1952. Its operations were absorbed by Brunswick Depot, about a mile distant. Coburg was used as a store for surplus and new trams for a while, and also withdrawn buses and other materials for a while. It was then converted into a centralised area for the then Distribution (now Electrical) Branch. The sectional workshops, stores and staff were brought together as much as possible (some tower wagons still operate from South Melbourne and Melbern yards). Over the years a good workshop and store has been built up and this 1916 structure still serves a very useful purpose, from which the overhead network and sub-stations are maintained.

