



Doing things a bit differently ...

A review of the short lived Melbourne Brunswick and Coburg Tramways Trust.

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A PRESENTATION TO THE COTMA  
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BY MAL ROWE

# Before the trams: The Melbourne Omnibus Company

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Established in 1869 by Francis Clapp who had come from America during the Victorian gold rush. They developed a wide range of horse drawn omnibus services.

In 1878 they commenced running horse drawn omnibuses from the city north along Royal Parade and Sydney Rd to Victoria St Brunswick.



# The Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Co

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In 1877, the Melbourne Omnibus Co was reconstituted as the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Co. and under an Act of 1883 was authorised to build tramways.

The Melbourne Tramways Trust, which represented eleven inner city councils, was a separate body owning the tracks and other infrastructure. They built the world's largest single cable tramway system. It was leased to the company until 1916.



# Crash!

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Victoria was badly affected by the 1890s crash after a land boom in the 1880s.

However, a growing population was present in the new 'outer' areas – often on blocks sold by the “land boomers” and they wanted better transport.

The MT&O Co was still very profitable, but their lease was due to end in 1916 and they had no incentive to invest in a 'stranded asset'.

Electric tram technology had made cable trams obsolete – no extensions were made to the vast cable network.

By 1916 inner Melbourne was virtually encircled by electric tramways serving developing suburbs beyond.



# Electric tramways arrive

The Victorian Railways opened a tramway between the railway terminus at St Kilda and Brighton in 1906.

The same year a private company opened lines from the North Melbourne cable tramway terminus at Flemington Bridge to Essendon and Maribyrnong River.

Both used Brill tramcars from the USA.





# Local Government to the rescue

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From 1910 Trusts sponsored by local government built electric tramways.

- Prahran & Malvern – opened 1910
- Hawthorn – opened 1916
- **Melbourne Brunswick & Coburg – opened 1916**

Two Trusts built tramways but did not run trams before being taken over by the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board in 1920

- Footscray
- Fitzroy, Northcote & Preston

# The MB&CTT

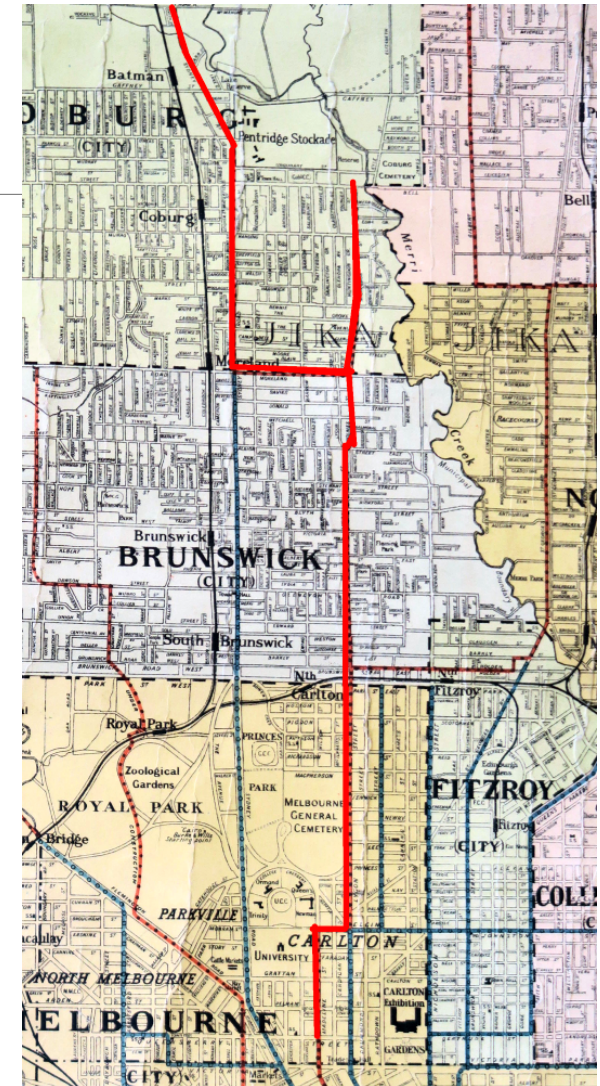
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The Melbourne, Brunswick and Coburg Tramways Trust was set up by the councils of those three municipalities in 1914 and started running trams in 1916



# The MB&CTT routes

- The Trust's engineer was Struan Robertson – an innovator,
- The Trust took over the old horse tram line in Sydney Rd north of Moreland Rd to Coburg. They rebuilt it as an electric tramway with a route extension to Bakers Rd.
- They built a tramway along Moreland Rd, down Lygon St, Elgin St and Swanston St to the corner of Queensberry St – within a short walk to the city.
- They built a tramway north up Nicholson St to connect to their depot and serve the Coburg Cemetery at Bell St.

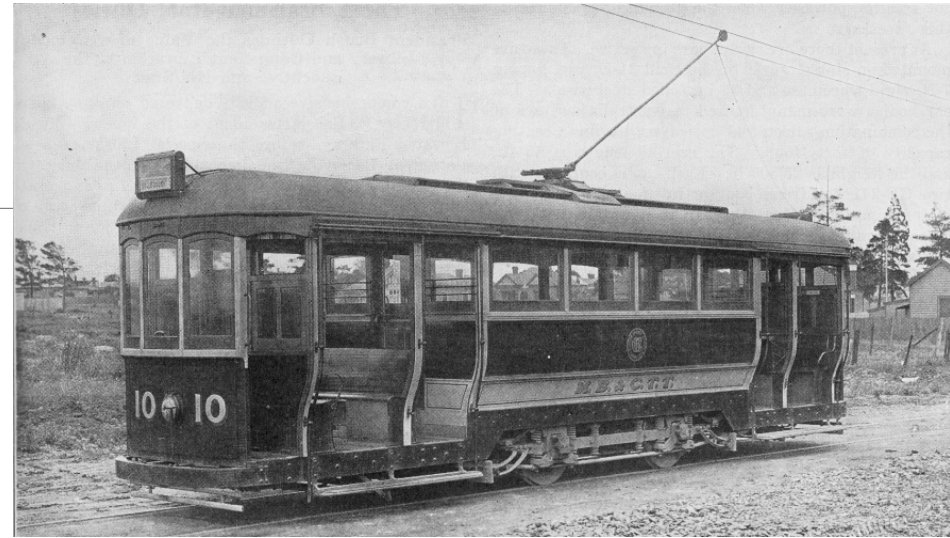




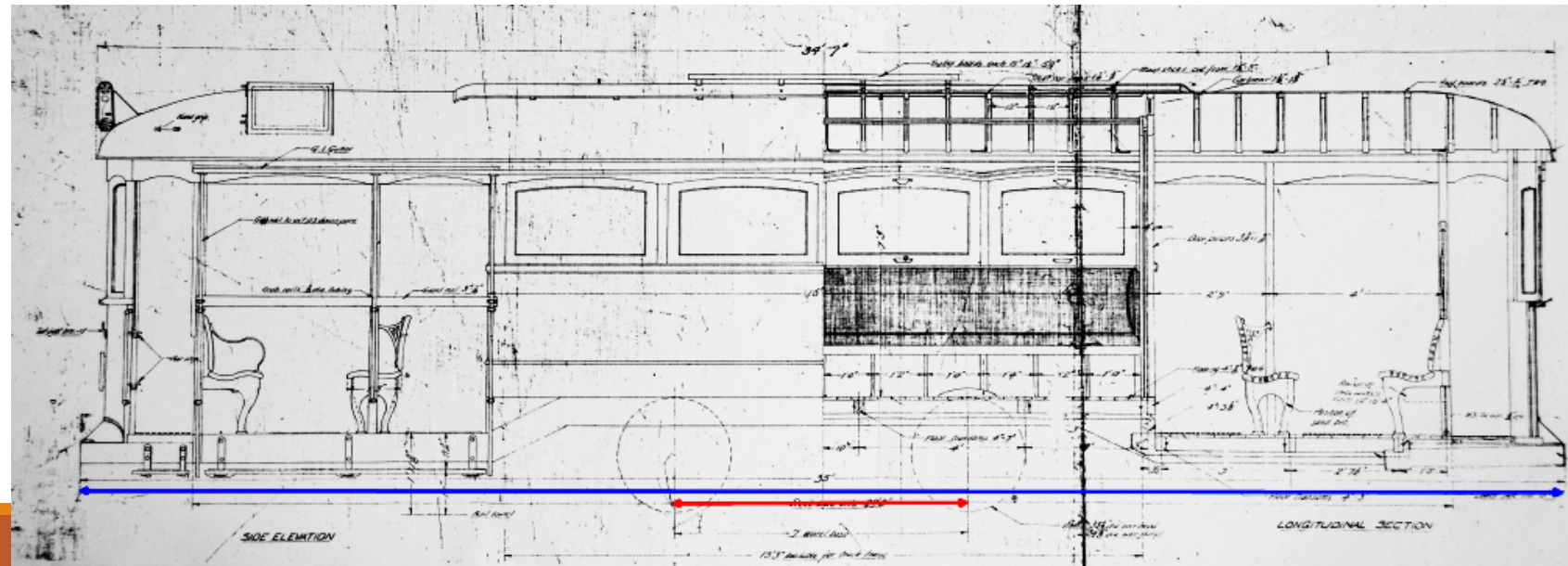
# The trams

Struan Robertson grew up in Christchurch and started his career in the drawing office of the Christchurch tramways.

He moved to Victoria in 1910 and joined the MB&CTT as their engineer and manager in 1914.



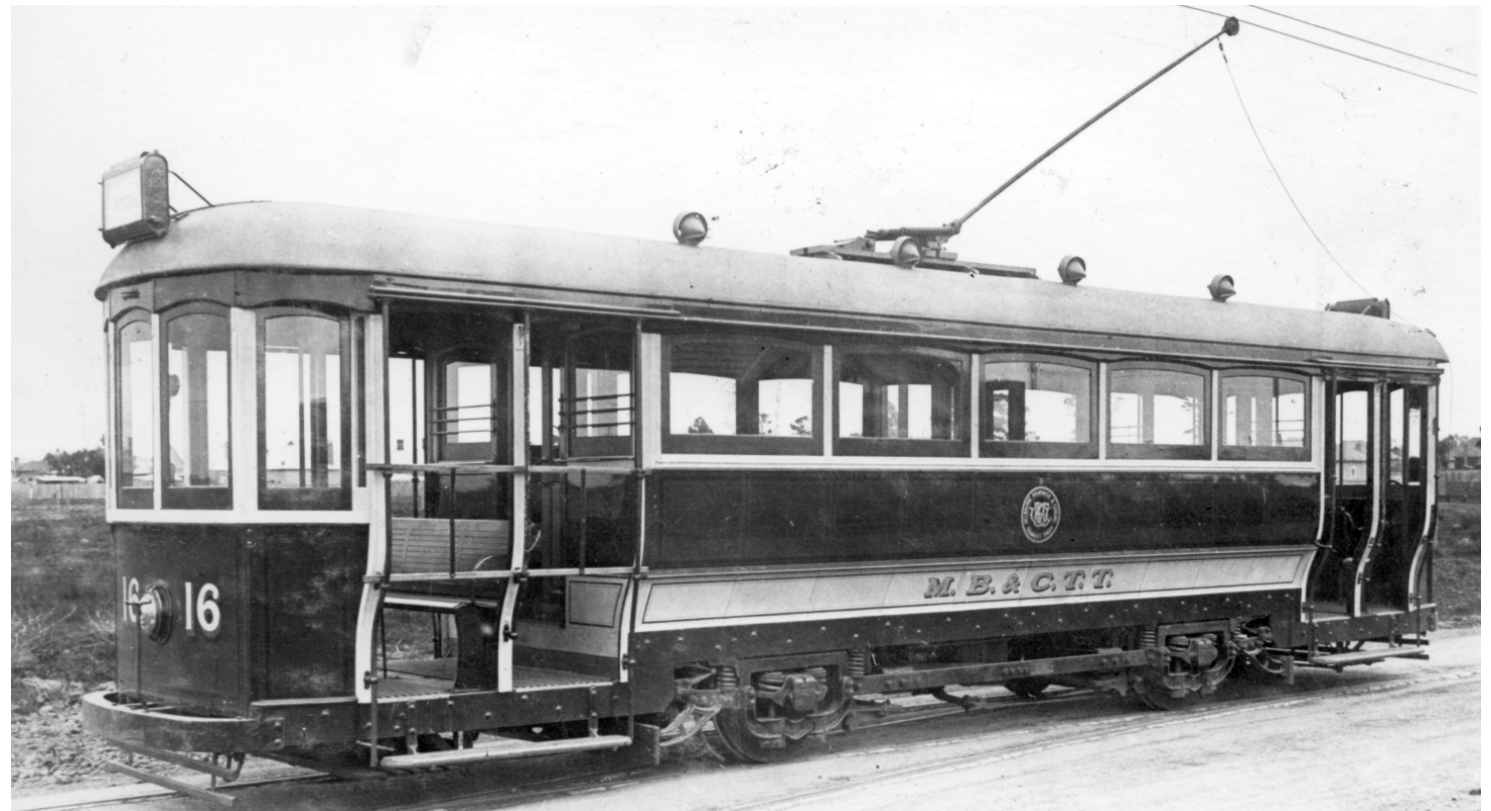
- First air braked trams
- Length 35' (10.67m)
- Wheelbase 7' (2.13M)



# Fixing the design

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- The second series of MB&CTT trams were built in 1917.
- They were the same length but had a much longer wheelbase.
- This was achieved by extending the saloon and fitting a Brill Radiax truck.



# Survivors

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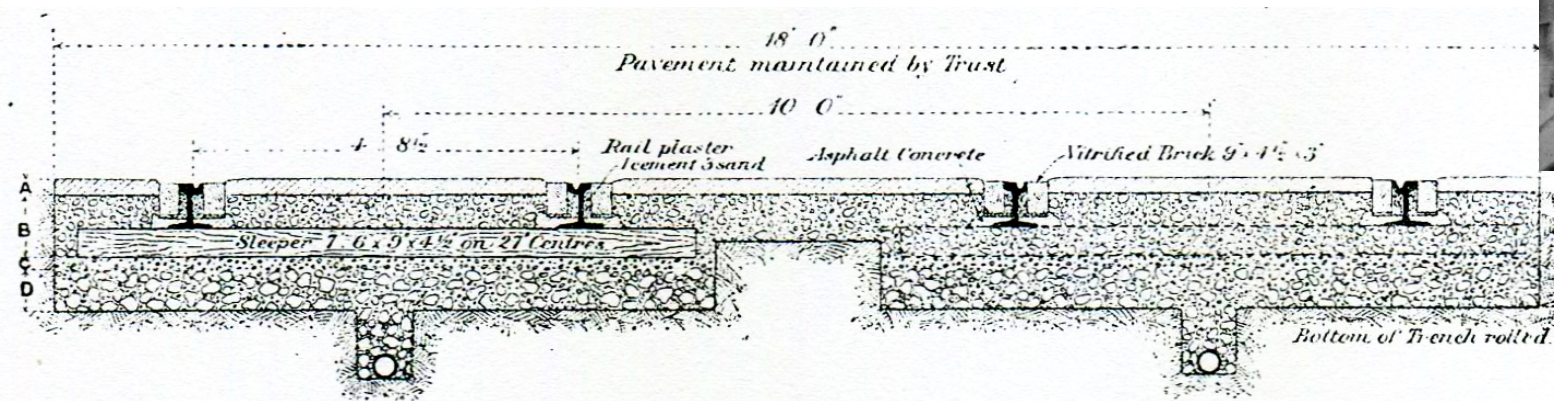
- The original MB&CTT trams spent much of their life in storage.
- The second design lasted a lot longer in active service – 45 years!
- The Melbourne Tram Museum has one of each type in their collection.



# The tracks

Struan Robertson's innovative engineering extended to the track construction. He reasoned that placing a line of bricks beside the rails would provide a stronger surface and reduce wear and tear on road and tracks.

The bricks crumbled due the pounding of the rails by the trams and had to be removed only 5 years later.





# Overhead poles

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Struan Robertson's quest for economy extended to the overhead – he used lighter poles than any of the other trust tramways.

Some developed substantial leans over the last 100 years and are mostly now replaced.



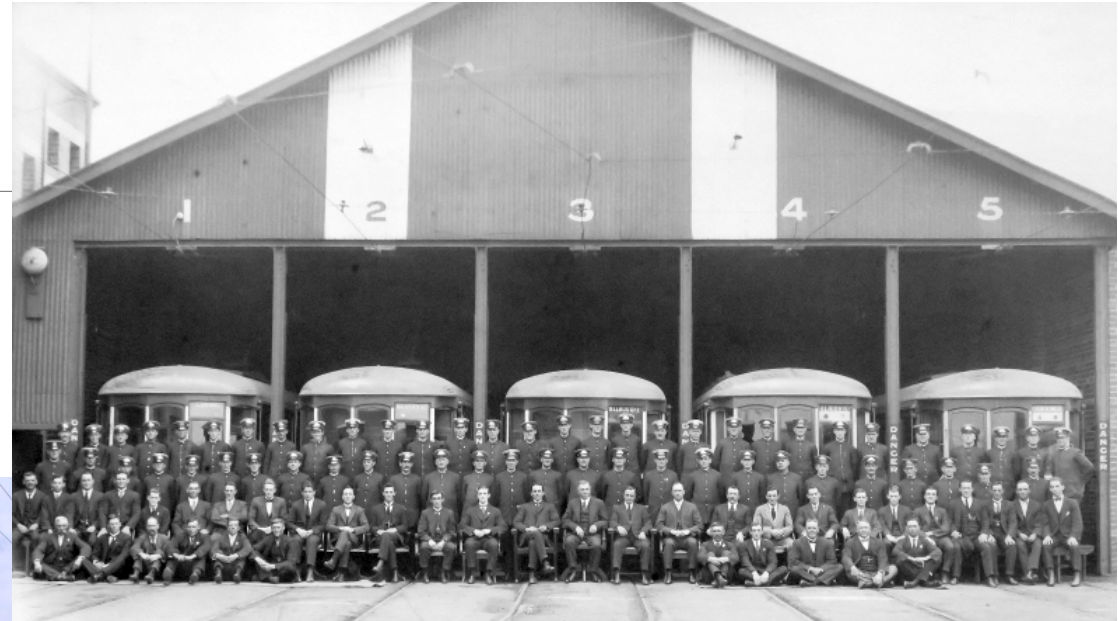
Some of the distinctive original pole finials still mark the MB&CTT routes

# Coburg Depot

The original Coburg tram depot was closed as a running depot in 1952 and used to store trams for a few years, then handed over to the MMTB overhead branch as their depot and workshop.

The depot was finally closed and demolished in 2007.

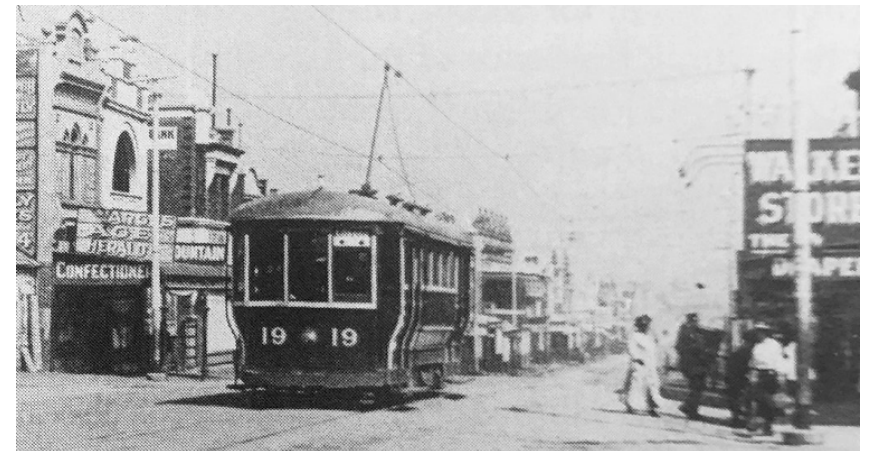
Some of the land was retained for a new tram substation.



# Where does this tram go?

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ability to read was far from universal, so the MB&CTT followed the common practice of the time and provided coloured symbols to indicate the destination.

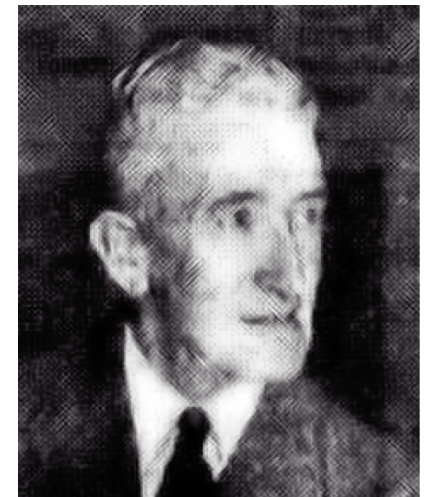
The destination roll was scrolled to show the related name and symbol.



# The End

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- In 1920, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board took over.
  - Struan Robertson had moved to the Hawthorn Tramways Trust in 1918. He was appointed Manager of the Eastern System in the MMTB.
  - The Board congratulated him in late 1920 on the award of the prestigious “Telford Premium” for a paper about the Coburg Tramways published in the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers.
  - Robertson retired from the MMTB, as Distribution Engineer, on 31 December 1946.



Struan Robertson  
The Age, 1 Mar 1948



# Thanks

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... questions?

