

**Carlton Community History Group**

# **NEWSLETTER**

**Issue No. 15**

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## **Cabs and Omnibuses**

In the late nineteenth century, Carlton and the northern suburbs of Melbourne more generally were poorly served by public transport. By the 1860s there were half-a-dozen suburban rail lines, but none of them ran into the northern suburbs. The first line to the north was not opened until 1884. The cable tram network was eventually to link the northern suburbs with the city, but the first of its lines was not opened until November 1885. For the citizens of Carlton in the 1860s and 1870s, the only forms of public transport available to them were horse drawn cabs and omnibuses.

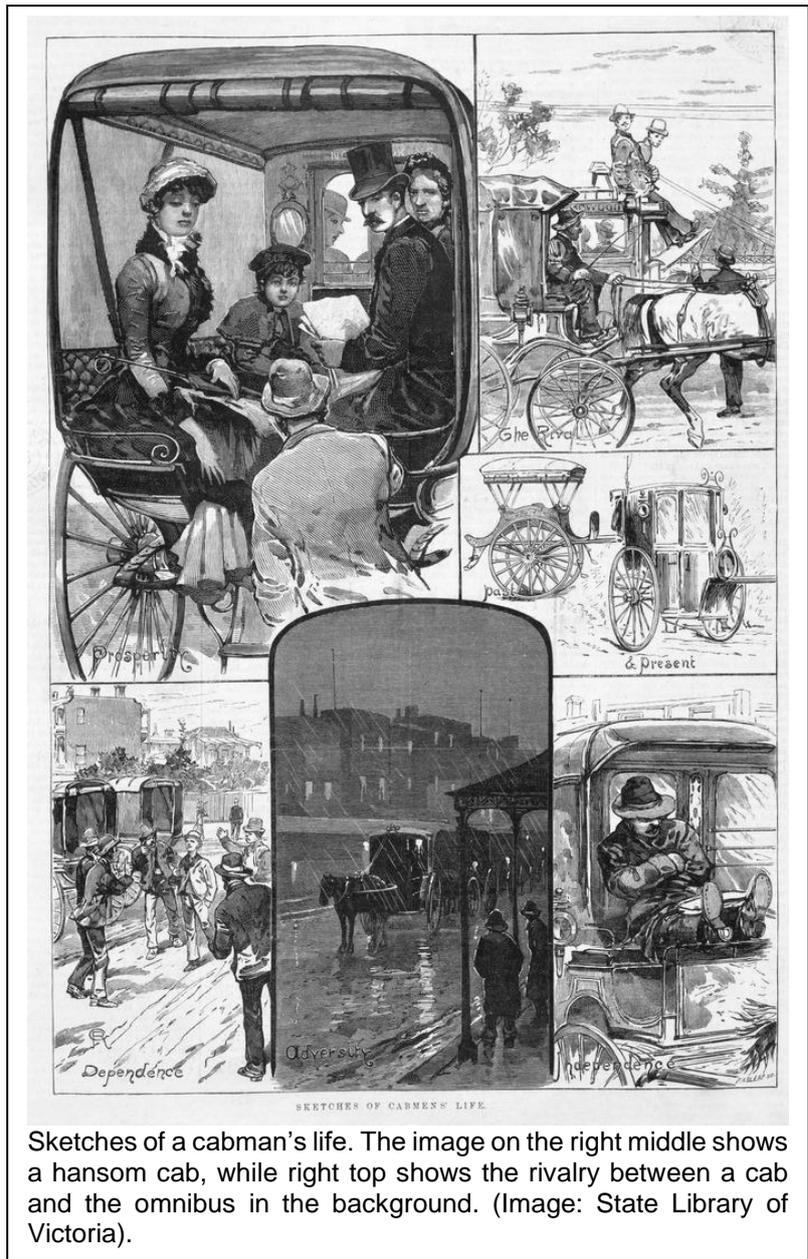


Wagonettes on a cab rank in Bourke Street near Swanston Street in around 1880. This is one of the ranks from which the Carlton cabs left. (Photo: State Library of Victoria)

Horse drawn cabs came in different shapes and styles. For the more affluent there were 'hansom cabs', which were small vehicles shaped like a sentry box with a driver on top. These seated two people only, and were pulled by a single horse. For the less affluent there were 'Albert cars', often referred to as 'jingles'. These were two-wheeled vehicles licensed to carry six people sitting back to back. The driver and two passengers sat in the front facing the horse and three more passengers sat behind them facing the rear. 'Jingles' were not particularly comfortable as passengers were sitting over the axle and were swayed and jolted on Melbourne's rough roads, and were only partially protected from the sun and rain by an oil-cloth canopy. They were also quite difficult to get on or off, especially for ladies in voluminous dresses. 'Jingles' were soon replaced by 'wagonettes', four-wheeled vehicles in which the passengers sat in the back on two benches facing one another, with an oil-cloth hood for protection and side flaps that could be let down in bad weather.

Cabs did not run to a schedule along set routes, but could be hailed in the street, and would take a number of passengers who wanted to go to the same area. A passenger would hail and board a cab and state his destination, and the cabman would then drive around the streets looking for other fares who wished to go to the same place, which could be very annoying to the original hailer. A frustrated writer in *The Leader* newspaper wrote in 1869: 'How many times have we not been induced to risk our necks by struggling up into one of these ridiculous vehicles under the delusion that "Right away Sir" meant at least some intention of starting within less than half an hour'.

In the city however there were cab ranks in which cabmen who plied to a particular suburb or district would wait for fares. We know for example that cabs that ran to Carlton could be picked up from the rank outside Flinders Street station, or from the corner of Bourke and Swanston Streets. This system evolved into cabs running set routes. The route to Carlton appears to have been along Swanston Street, then Lygon Street, into Elgin Street and then along Rathdowne Street. There is an account in 1877 of an accident in which a wagonette cab turned from Elgin Street into Rathdowne Street at full gallop and knocked over and killed an old lady.



Sketches of a cabman's life. The image on the right middle shows a hansom cab, while right top shows the rivalry between a cab and the omnibus in the background. (Image: State Library of Victoria).

## Horse drawn 'buses

A major step forward in terms of comfort and convenience was achieved in 1869 when a trio of American businessmen in Melbourne formed the Melbourne Omnibus Company and introduced an American style coach with superior suspension more suited to Melbourne's rough roads. These were brightly decorated vehicles drawn by two horses, in which passengers sat facing one another in a spacious fully enclosed cabin with glass windows and a door at the rear. The coaches were at first imported from the United States but were later manufactured by the company at its stables in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. These horse drawn omnibuses (or 'buses for short) ran on set routes from the city to the suburbs and back to a set timetable and for a fixed fare. The first route was established by the company in 1869 and ran from the city to Collingwood and back. Other routes were soon established from Flinders Street railway station to Fitzroy, Richmond, Carlton and North Melbourne and later as far as Brunswick, Moonee Ponds, Clifton Hill and Prahran.

The omnibus was a popular form of public transport. The coaches were comfortable and colourful, the service was regular and reliable, and the fares were remarkably cheap. By 1881 the Melbourne Omnibus Company was operating 15 different routes into the suburbs using 178 omnibuses and 1600 horses, and carrying more than ten million urban passengers a year. One writer commented at the time that: 'Nowhere do omnibuses drive a more thriving trade than in Melbourne, and they deserve it, for they are fast, clean, roomy and well managed'. They made it possible and practical for residents of places like Carlton to commute to the city for work each day at a reasonable cost.

**Interested in local history?  
Then join us in the Carlton Community History Group  
and help preserve our past for the future.**

**Are you interested in working on projects such as:**

- Researching your own family history as it relates to Carlton;
- Helping to maintain our Facebook page;
- Publicising the Group and its activities;

**Sounds interesting? Then contact us to see how you can be involved.**

Email: [cchg@y7mail.com](mailto:cchg@y7mail.com) Website: [www.cchg.asn.au](http://www.cchg.asn.au)

## Local History News

### Historic field gun for Barkly Gardens

A rare historic First World War field gun is being installed in the Barkly Gardens in Richmond for public display. It is a German field gun that was captured by Australian troops in 1918. Originally gifted to the City of Collingwood after the war, it was for more than 90 years displayed in the Darling Gardens in Clifton Hill. In 2013 it was removed by the City of Yarra and restored, and is now being re-installed in Richmond. The restored gun will be unveiled at a special Remembrance Day Service in the Barkly Gardens on 11 November 2019 from 10.30am to 11.30am.

### Winner of the 2019 Victorian Premier's History Award

The Victorian Premier's History Award, which recognises the most outstanding community history project in any category, has been won this year by the book *Avenue of Memories* by Phil Roberts. Of the many memorials to the service of Australian men and women during the First World War, among the more notable are Ballarat's Arch of Victory and the Avenue of Honour that commemorates all those who enlisted from Ballarat. *Avenue of Memories* was produced to mark the centenary of the Arch and Avenue. As such it is not about the service of the individuals who are honoured, but rather about the ongoing dedication of the Ballarat community to maintaining the Arch and Avenue over the past century.

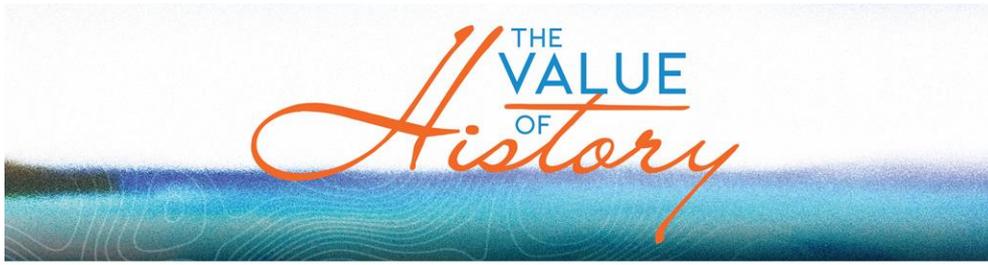
### Victoria's earliest potteries

As part of its annual general meeting on 17 November, the Richmond and Burnley Historical Society is presenting a talk by Gregory Hill, a leading authority on Australian colonial potteries, on 'Victoria's Earliest Potteries'. In the early days of Melbourne, the geology of Richmond and Hawthorn provided excellent clays that led to the development of Victoria's early potteries and brickworks.

Sunday 17th November, 2.30pm, Studio One, 22 Bendigo Street, Richmond.

### Gaslight base removed

On the south-west corner of Nicholson and Pigdon Streets is what looks like a very large cast-iron bollard, but which is in fact the base of a 19<sup>th</sup> century street gaslight. Road and tram works planned for that part of Nicholson Street mean that it has to be removed. We understand that it will be stored temporarily and eventually put back on that corner. However there is a problem with its placement. Modern regulations say that it must be at least 60 centimeters in from the curb. But this would put it in the way of pedestrians. We await news of whether and where it will be reinstalled.



*The following statement was adopted on 3 July 2019 by the History Councils of New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia:*

The study of the past and telling its stories are critical to our sense of belonging, to our communities and to our shared future. History shapes our identities, engages us as citizens, creates inclusive communities, is part of our economic well-being, teaches us to think critically and creatively, inspires leaders and is the foundation of our future generations.

**Identity:** History nurtures identity in a world characterised by difference and change. History enables people to discover their own place in stories of families, communities, First Peoples, and nations—individuals and groups who have shaped the world in which they live. There are stories of freedom and oppression, justice and inequity, war and peace, endurance and achievement, courage and tenacity. Through these varied stories, the systems of personal and community values that guide approaches to life and relationships with others are shaped.

**Engaged citizens:** History helps people craft solutions that meet community needs. At the heart of democracy are individual citizens who come together to express views and take action. Understanding the history of contemporary issues that confront our communities, nation and world can clarify misperceptions, reveal complexities, temper volatile viewpoints, and open people to new possibilities, leading to more effective solutions.

**Strong communities:** History lays the groundwork for strong, diverse and inclusive communities that are vital places to live and work. Communities are wrapped in human memory: Indigenous knowledge, family stories, oral histories, social customs, cultural collections, heritage and civic commemorations. These all strengthen our connections and commitment to one another. History supports a sense of community identity and place; and that in turn promotes social cohesion, individual and collective wellbeing, and resilience.

**Economic development:** History is a catalyst for economic growth. People are drawn to communities with a strong sense of historical identity, material heritage and character. Cultural heritage is a demonstrated economic asset and an essential component of any vibrant local economy, providing an infrastructure that attracts talent and enhances business development, including cultural tourism.

**Critical skills:** History teaches independent thinking and vital skills for the twenty-first century. Historical thinking requires critical approaches to evidence and argument and develops contextual understanding and historical perspective, encouraging meaningful engagement with concepts like continuity, change and causation, and the ability to interpret and communicate complex ideas clearly and coherently.

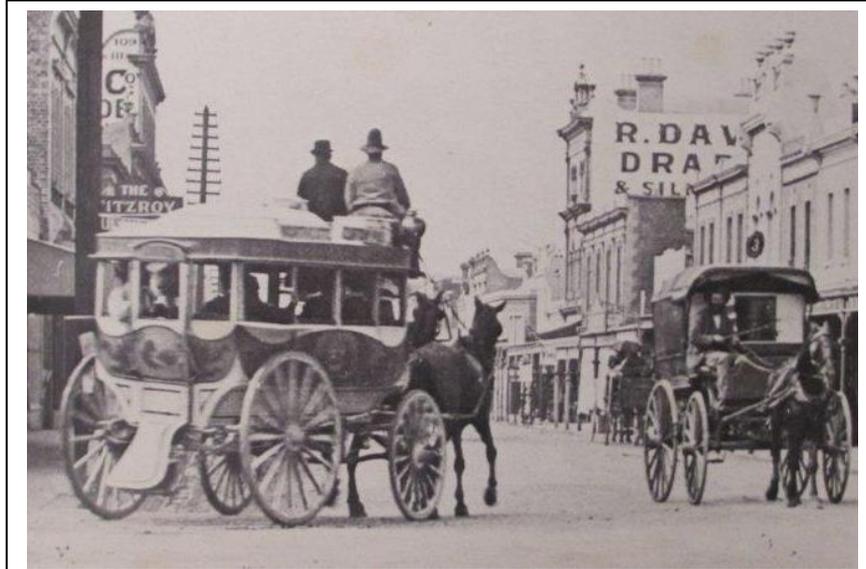
**Leadership:** History inspires leaders. It provides them with role models to meet complex challenges. Personal stories of leadership reveal how women and men met the challenges of their day and can give new leaders the courage and wisdom to confront the challenges of our time.

**Legacy:** History is the foundation for future generations. It is crucial to our future because it explains our shared past. When we preserve authentic, meaningful and significant stories, places, documents, images and artefacts, we leave a foundation upon which future Australians can build. (Source: History Council of Victoria, [https://www.historycouncilvic.org.au/value\\_of\\_history](https://www.historycouncilvic.org.au/value_of_history))

## Paying the fare

The omnibuses that ran in Melbourne in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century charged a flat-rate fee of threepence, no matter what the length of the journey. At first the fares were collected by boys who were employed to ride on the omnibuses as conductors. But these lads tended to be a bit rough and not always civil to the passengers. The company therefore did away with them and introduced a system that enabled the driver to collect the fares. Passengers deposited their threepences into a box that had an upper and lower compartment. The upper compartment had glass panels that enabled the driver to see and check the money deposited. He then pulled a lever and the money fell into the sealed lower compartment. Not everyone was happy about the loss of conductors. One Carlton resident wrote to *The Herald* complaining of the meanness of the company in discharging their conductors:

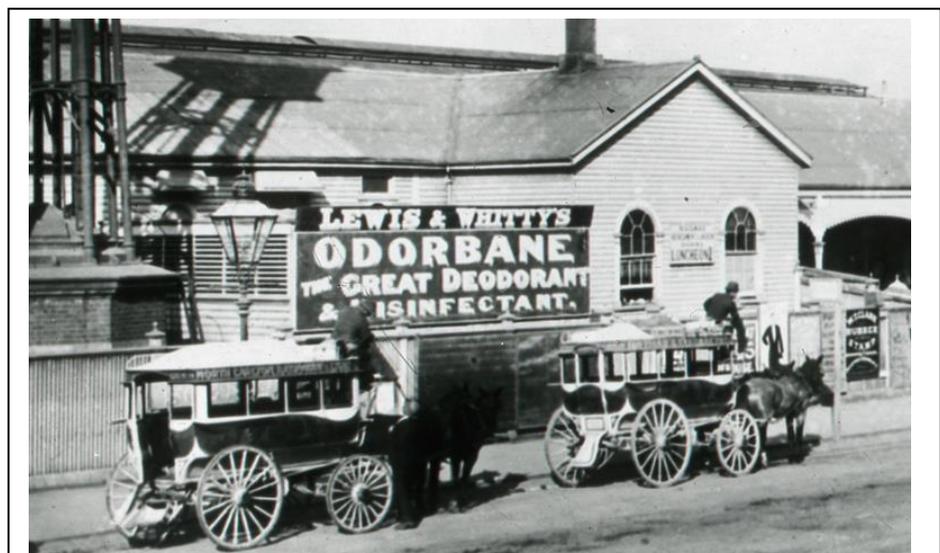
I have to state that they are losing daily between 50 and 60 regular passengers between Carlton and Melbourne and Melbourne and Carlton; also there are a great number of ladies who are constantly riding to town during the day, but who now take the cabs rather than be annoyed by rising up to hand money to the driver.



The Clifton Hill omnibus rounds the corner from Gertrude Street into Smith Street, Fitzroy. Wagonette cab on the right.

## The Carlton omnibus

It is not clear what route the Carlton omnibus took. It was the second route established by the Company in 1869, and we know that it started from the Flinders Street railway station (Elizabeth Street entrance). What route it took from there to Carlton is not clear. However we do know that in October 1886 a new route was opened to North Carlton, which ran from Flinders Street station along Elizabeth Street then via Swanston, Lygon and Elgin Streets to Rathdowne Street. It then ran along Rathdowne Street to its terminus at the corner of Rathdowne and Richardson Streets in North Carlton (*The Herald*, 1 October 1886, p. 3).



Omnibuses outside the Elizabeth Street entrance to Flinders Street railway station in the 1880s. The one on the left has a sign along the top that says 'North Carlton. Rathdowne Street'. (Photo: State Library of Victoria).

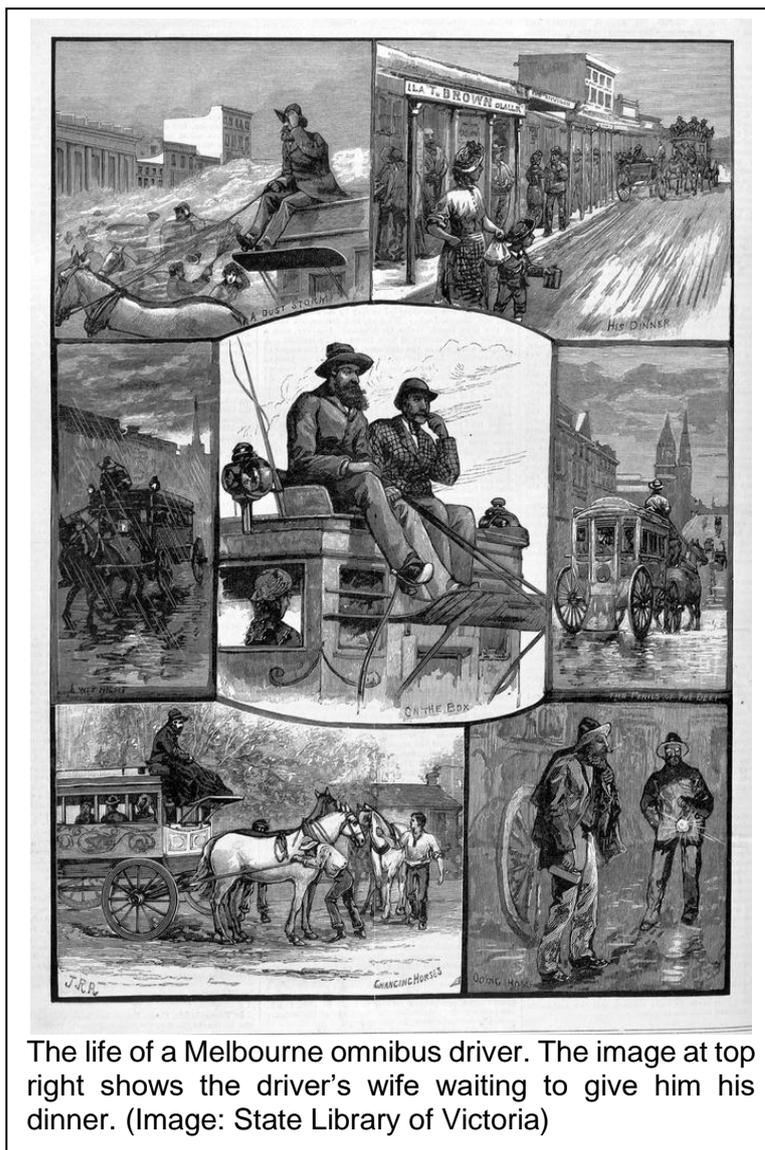
It then ran along Rathdowne Street to its terminus at the corner of Rathdowne and Richardson Streets in North Carlton (*The Herald*, 1 October 1886, p. 3).

Not everyone was happy with the service provided by the Carlton omnibus. In August 1881, a man signing himself 'Carltonian' wrote to *The Argus* newspaper complaining:

There is, according to the last census, a population of close upon 40,000 in Carlton, and the omnibuses run at such long intervals, particularly in the early morning, that they are practically useless to nine-tenths of the people. I suppose there is scarcely one in ten that can catch an omnibus between the hours of half past 7 and 9am, during which time probably some 10,000 people leave their homes for businesses in the city.... Fitzroy and Collingwood, which united are scarcely as large as Carlton, have no less than four different lines of omnibuses running to them, and each at short intervals, while we have only one line, and at such long intervals to be useless as a reliable means of getting to town.

## Replaced by cable trams

It was always the intention of the Melbourne Omnibus Company that its horse drawn omnibuses would eventually be replaced by a more modern form of public transport that it wished to introduce from America - the cable tram. In 1885 the company began to do just that, and by 1891 it had established cable tram routes to all of Melbourne's inner ring of suburbs. In Carlton there were eventually cable trams along Lygon, Elgin, Rathdowne and Nicholson Streets. The company (now called the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company) continued to operate its horse drawn omnibuses, but as 'feeders' to a cable tram terminus from districts not directly served by the trams. This enabled the horse drawn vehicles to struggle on for a few more years. The last of the omnibus routes, which closed in 1916, was one that ran from the North Carlton terminus of the cable tram at the northern end of Rathdowne Street into and through East Brunswick. (*The Argus*, 1 July 1916).



The life of a Melbourne omnibus driver. The image at top right shows the driver's wife waiting to give him his dinner. (Image: State Library of Victoria)

This Newsletter is produced and distributed four times a year. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, email the Carlton Community History Group at [cchg@y7mail.com](mailto:cchg@y7mail.com) or visit our website [www.cchg.asn.au](http://www.cchg.asn.au)

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