

## DEATHS ON TRAMS

An interesting document in the Museum archives is a listing of fatal incidents involving trams, buses and trolleybuses. It is a hard-covered register entitled "Fatal Book 1897 - " [sic] on the outside cover, with the title page headed "Fatal Accidents". The register would appear to list details of all fatalities relating to tramway operation in Brisbane and the first few years of bus-only operations after April 1969.

The first entry is - "1 Fox, Joseph November 3, 1897 Opp Railway Gates, Roma St Fell off Tower Wagon." The last entry is - "590 Horne, Janet C 11.10.74 Accident No 17857." Unfortunately the facing page with details is missing. (There may have been subsequent pages as the binding is broken at this part of the book). The 509 entries in the register which do not relate to buses incidents include traffic accidents, industrial accidents, suicides and deaths by natural causes.

However, categorisation of the causes of the deaths is difficult because the details have been entered by different authors using differing terminology and criteria. For example, the first reference to someone dying of natural causes on a tram is in 1953 and after that date entries appear for deaths occurring even of people waiting at tram or bus stops. It is assumed that such events were simply not recorded in earlier times as not being relevant.

Another example of an incident which is difficult to categorise is one showing "Horse attached to cart shied & collided with tram, shaft striking her" - was "her" a tram passenger or someone in the cart, or a passer-by? There is also the possibility that some may have been suicides, indeed the word is added in brackets in some entries. "Man alights near track from utility and walks backwards into tram" would also seem to suggest suicide although it is not noted as such. Several head-on collisions between trams and cars also seem suspicious.

A fairly detailed examination of the register seems to suggest that the following categorisation is a reasonable summary of the data:

- Collisions with motor vehicles 110
- Pedestrians knocked down 118
- Falls from moving trams 64
- Alighting from moving trams 59
- Boarding moving trams 25
- Miscellaneous Falls 1
- Knocked down by motor vehicle 23
- Level Crossing train/tram collisions 2
- Suicide 3
- Employee Accidents 28
- Employees - Natural Causes 6
- Miscellaneous 30

Motorcycles seem to figure disproportionately. Of the 110 collisions, 10 were motorcycles, while on both 17th and 18th August 1956, motorcyclists were killed by riding into excavated track at Wynnum Rd, Norman Park.

The two worst incidents involved trams catching fire from exploding petrol tanks after collisions. 5 passengers died after an American Army vehicle collided with Dropcentre 289 in Beaudesert Rd on 6th September 1943, while 3 passengers and the motorman died after a collision between a bus and Dropcentre 283 in Stanley St Woolloongabba on 26th July 1948.

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