

# ROCKHAMPTON TRAMWAYS

## 75 YEARS OF COUNCIL TRANSPORT

By K. McCarthy

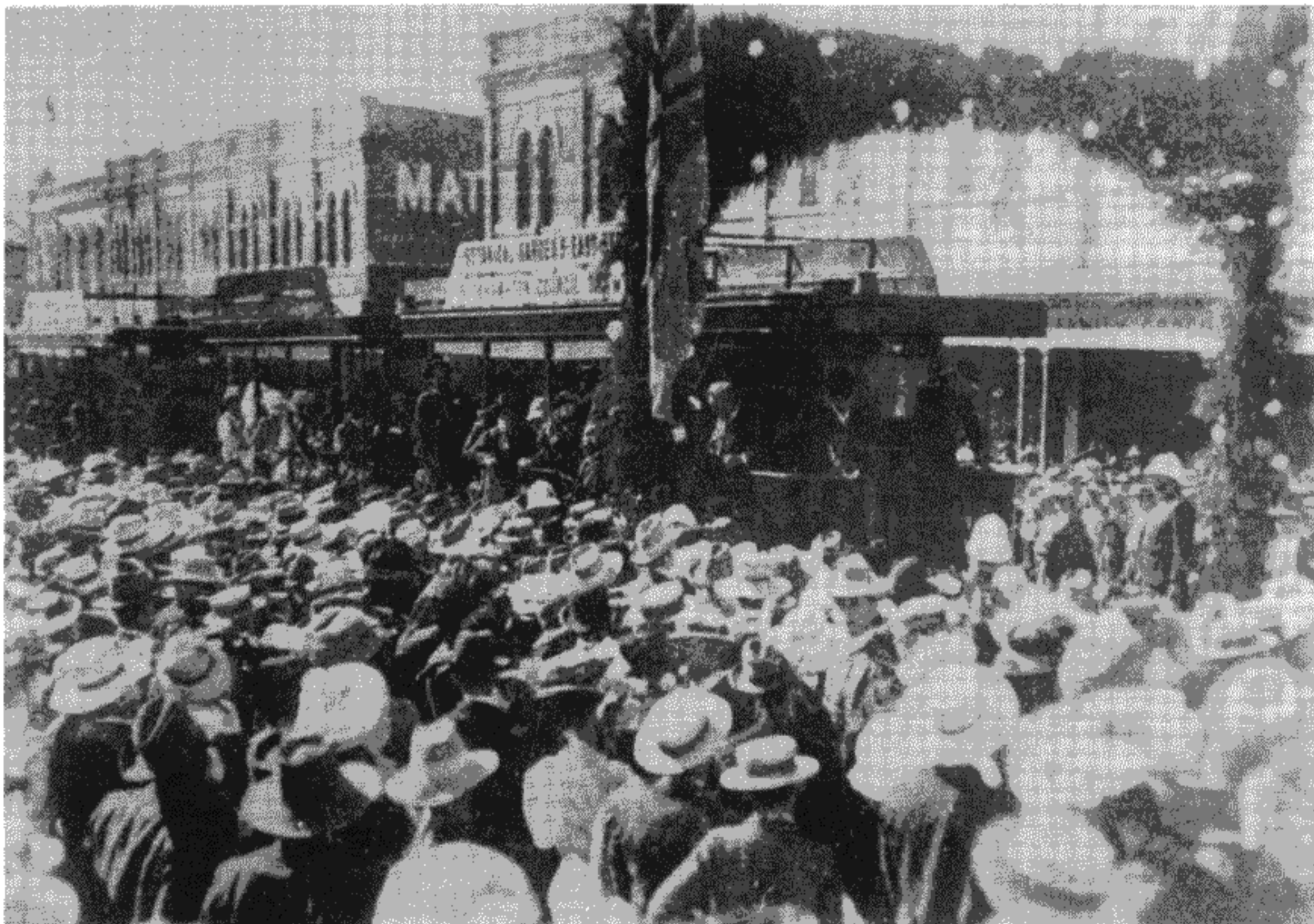
On 8 June a Grand Ball was staged in Rockhampton to celebrate 75 years of municipal street transport in that Queensland city. On 5 June, 1909 the Premier of Queensland, the Hon. W. Kidson, drove the first tram under a ceremonial archway in William Street near Bolsover Street and declared the undertaking open in time to handle traffic during the Rockhamptom Carnival Week.

So the Rockhampton Council became involved in street transportation operation, a service which continues to the present day.

The story of this interesting steam tramway undertaking has been related by John Knowles in the Australian Railway Historical Society *Bulletin* editions of June, August and September 1974 and

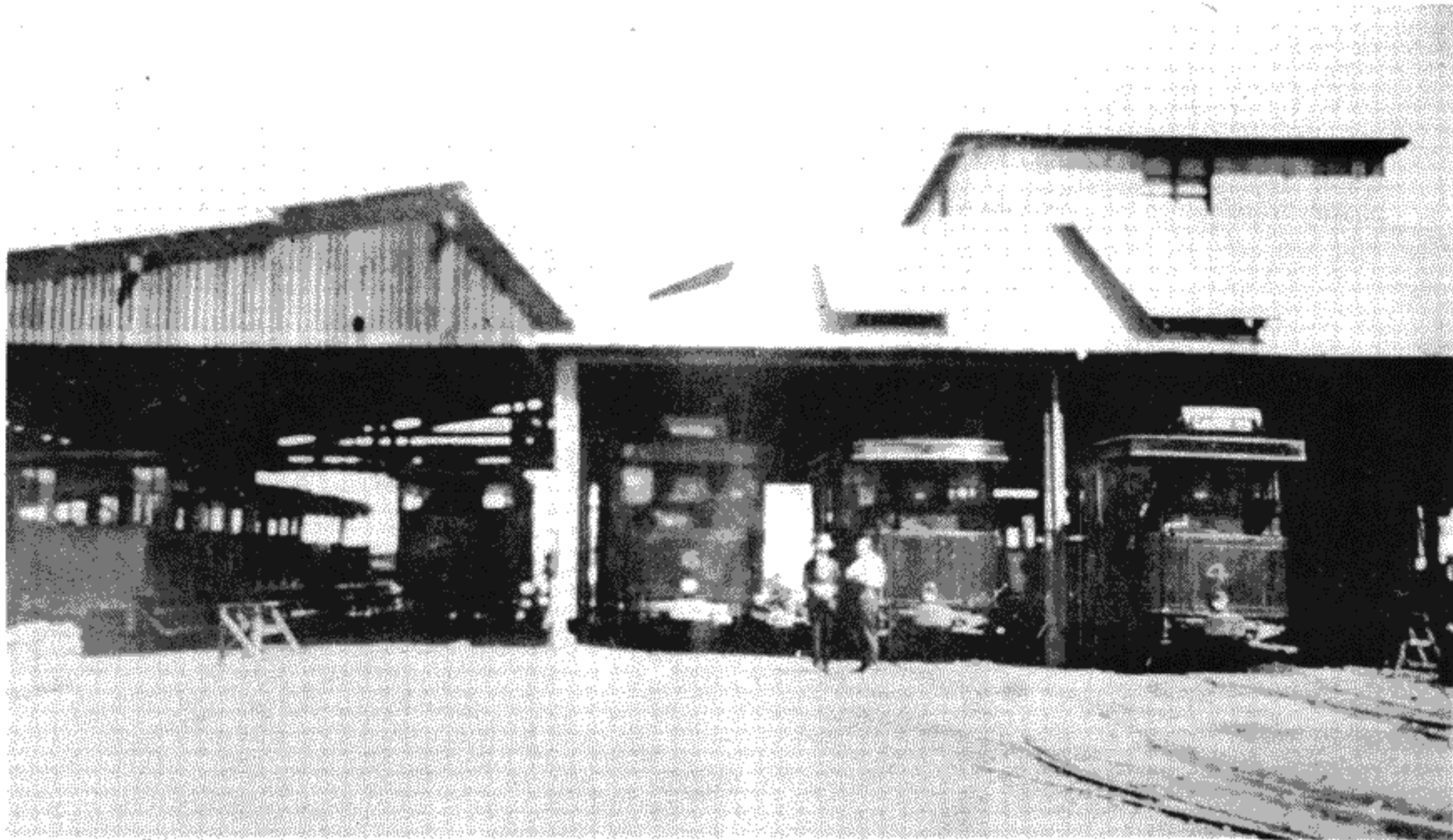
October 1976 while other information on the subject has appeared in this magazine during February and October 1967, June, August and December 1972, February and August 1973, April and August 1976. In addition, this magazine has published translated material written by Dr. J. Brenot of Bordeaux on the products of the Purrey factory in the August of 1978 and August 1983 editions. The Rockhampton trams were the products of the Purrey plant in Bordeaux, France.

The Rockhampton tramways were built to the Queensland railway gauge of 3ft-6in and the initial system of almost six route miles consisted of a belt or circular route around the main city area with branches to Gardens, Showgrounds and Dawson



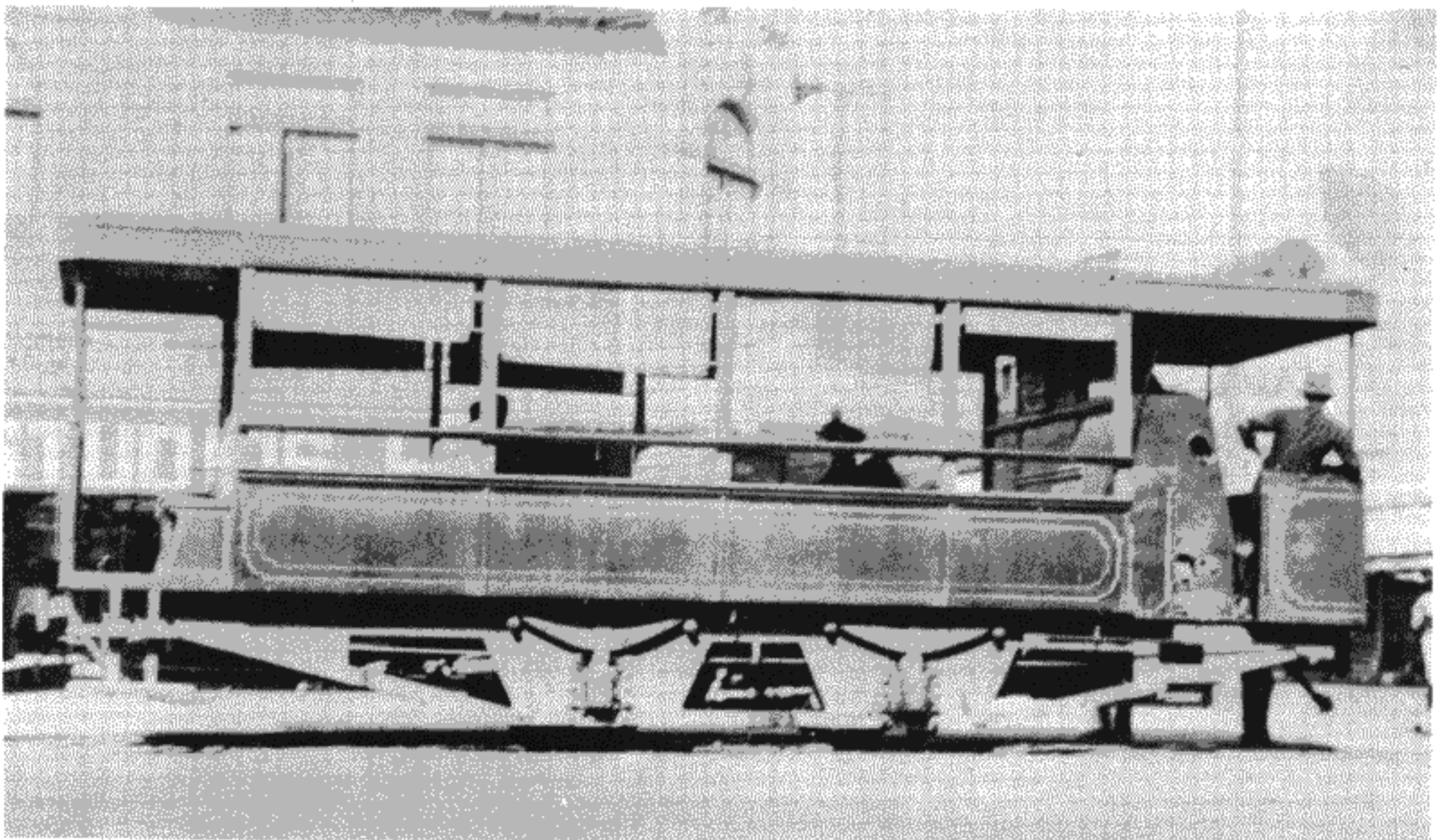
*Queensland Premier W. Kidson opening the Rockhampton Tramways at the corner of Bolsover and William Streets on 5 June, 1909.*

C. THOMAS COLLECTION



*Canning Street Depot, Rockhampton. Steam cars 4, 3 and 6 stand at the shed entrance, while a further power car and three trailers can just be seen in the shadows of the traler shed at the left, circa 1930.*

*C. THOMAS COLLECTION*



*Steam car No. 5 waiting for departure time, circa 1934.*

*B. WILES FROM C. THOMAS COLLECTION*

indicates that this tram was not part of the original order.

A total of nine steam powered passenger trams were eventually used on the Rockhampton Tramway. All were Purrey products although the last vehicle delivered in 1922 was built in the Bordeaux plant by Exschaw who had taken over the business from Purrey eight years before.

These powered cars were numbered 1 to 8 and 15, but this latter vehicle was renumbered 9 in 1934 to bring the numbering scheme into the same block. All powered trams were able to seat 40 passengers on open cross bench seating. Prior to 1924 car 15 (later 9) could only seat 24 on two longitudinal seats in a saloon body but this was converted after two years operation to an identical seating arrangement as the first eight tramcars.

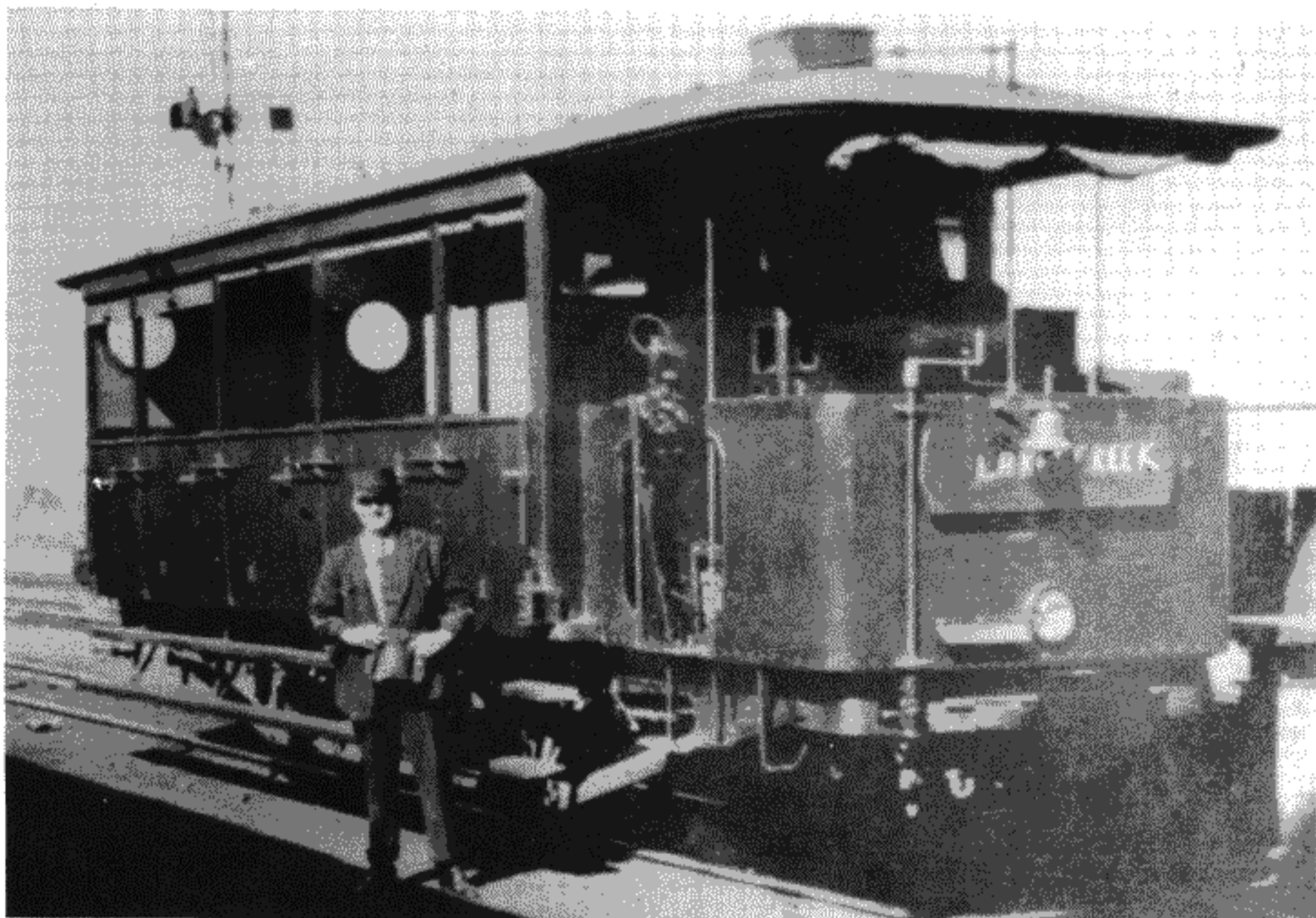
A total of six trailers were used at Rockhampton, built between 1909 and 1921. The two original vehicles, which provided covered seats for 40 passengers on open cross benches were constructed by Brown of London and carried numbers 1 and 2. Trailer No. 3 appeared in 1911 with a roofless body seating 40. This vehicle later received a roof making it identical to trailers 1 and 2.

Around 1914 the three trailer cars were renumbered 9, 10 and 11. During 1920 an additional 40 seat roofless trailer was constructed as No. 12 and this was subsequently rebuilt like No. 3 (later 11).

Two larger open sided roofed trailers were introduced in 1921 which could seat 50 passengers each. These were given numbers 13 and 14.

Trailer number 9 continued to carry that number after powered car No. 15 was renumbered 9, so two tramcars carried identical numbers from 1934 until 1939.

During 1922 a 52 chain extension beyond Showgrounds to Wandal opened for service bringing the total tramway route length to 6½ miles. In 1922 tramcar No. 8 was fitted with railway contour wheels for trials on the local railway service through North Rockhampton to Lakes Creek on the north side of the Fitzroy River. The Queensland Railways were satisfied with the trials and ordered two similar steam rail cars in 1924 from France. These were possibly the last tramcars built to the Purrey design. The powered cars carried numbers 30 and 31 and matching trailers received 32 and 33.



*Queensland Railways Purrey car No. 30 in its final form with waist-high sides and doors, when operating on the Rockhampton to Lakes Creek suburban run, circa 1930. The linkage on the roof provided mechanical connection between the regulator controls on the front and back platforms for reverse operation.*

These steam rail cars worked the Lakes Creek and Parkhurst railway services until 1930 when bus competition caused their withdrawal. After a period of operation on the Alton Downs branch railway the rail cars were finally scrapped in 1937.

After thirty years of operation the Rockhampton City Tramways were in need of modernisation and renewal of both vehicles and track. The council reached the decision in 1938 to replace the trams with diesel buses and enough new vehicles had been delivered from Sydney by April 1939 for a partial bus service to be introduced. From that time the buses operated most of the base services with the trams only appearing at peak periods. The trams handled the heavy traffic during Carnival Week and ceased operation on the evening of 24 June, 1939 when car No. 5 hauling two trailers (possibly 10 and 11) made the final trip back to the depot.

The tramway vehicles remained in the depot yard for some time while the council tried to sell them for scrap in a single batch. This plan did not meet with success so the tramcars were sold piece

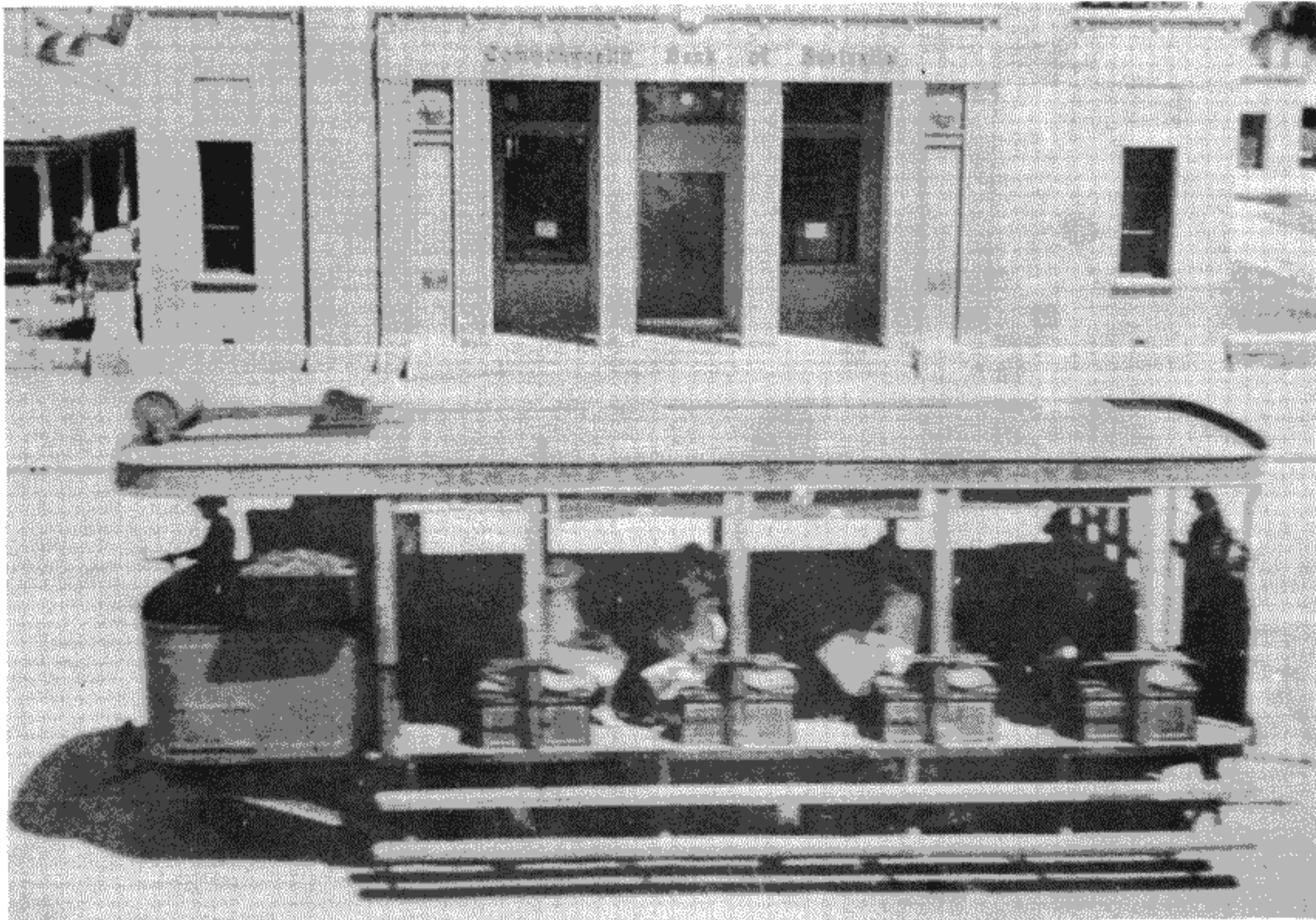
by piece between March 1940 and October 1941.

Some motor and trailer chassis were used as trolleys on the Gavial Creek and Stanley Street jetties while at least one trailer underframe was put to similar use at Port Alma.

The Rockhampton City Council continues to operate an efficient bus service throughout the city and neighbouring districts well beyond the former tram terminals.

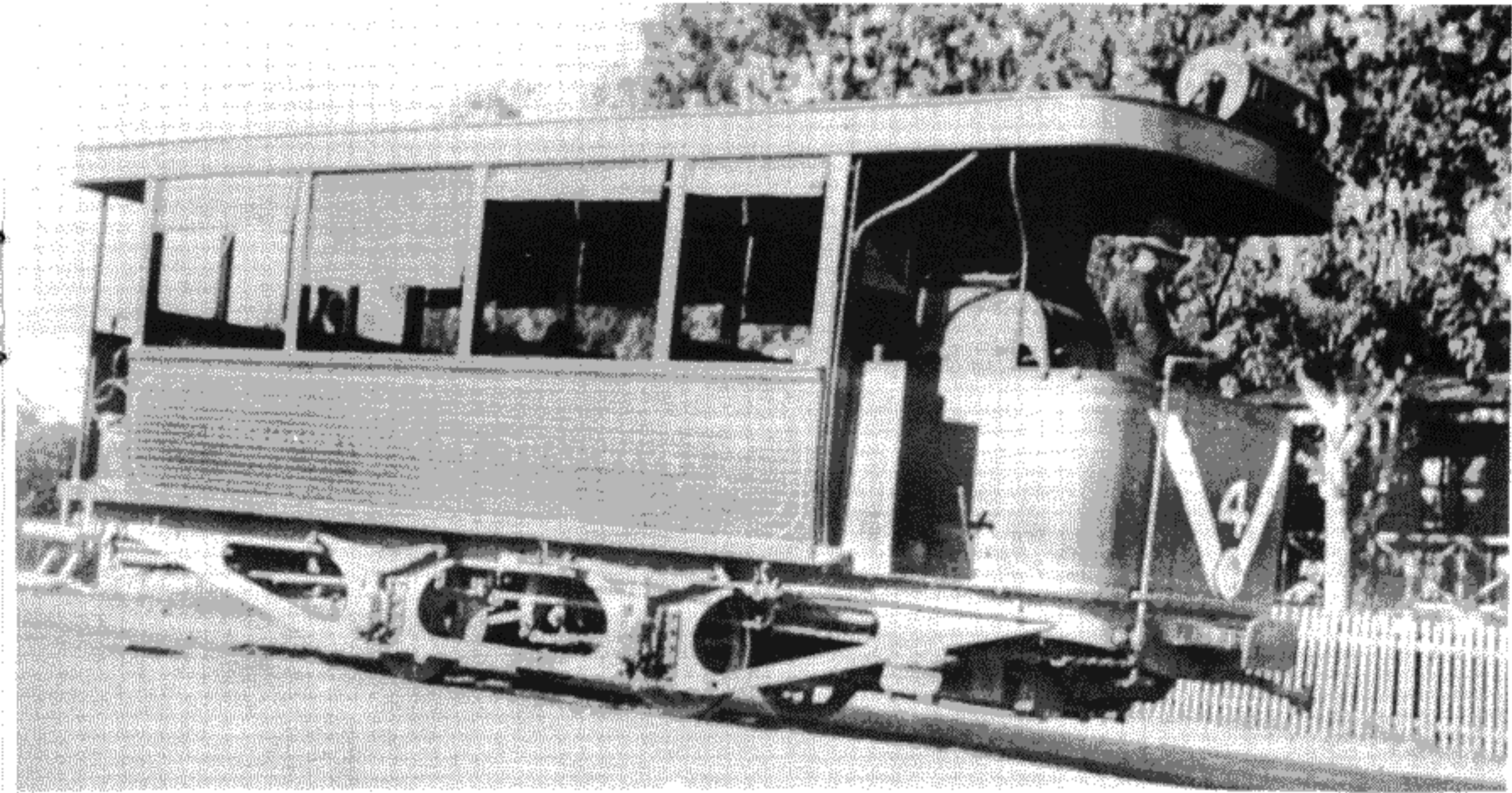
The tramway story of Rockhampton seemed to be concluded but events took an interesting turn during 1976. Due to interest developed in the local tramway system by the then current articles in the *ARHS Bulletin* and this magazine *Trolley Wire*, the Rockhampton Branch of the National Trust of Queensland started to seek out the location of the remaining tramway relics.

This group was able to retrieve the body of Car 3 from the Seonee scout camp at North Rockhampton and the trailer chassis from Port Alma. The location of additional relics required considerable detection work as items had been further



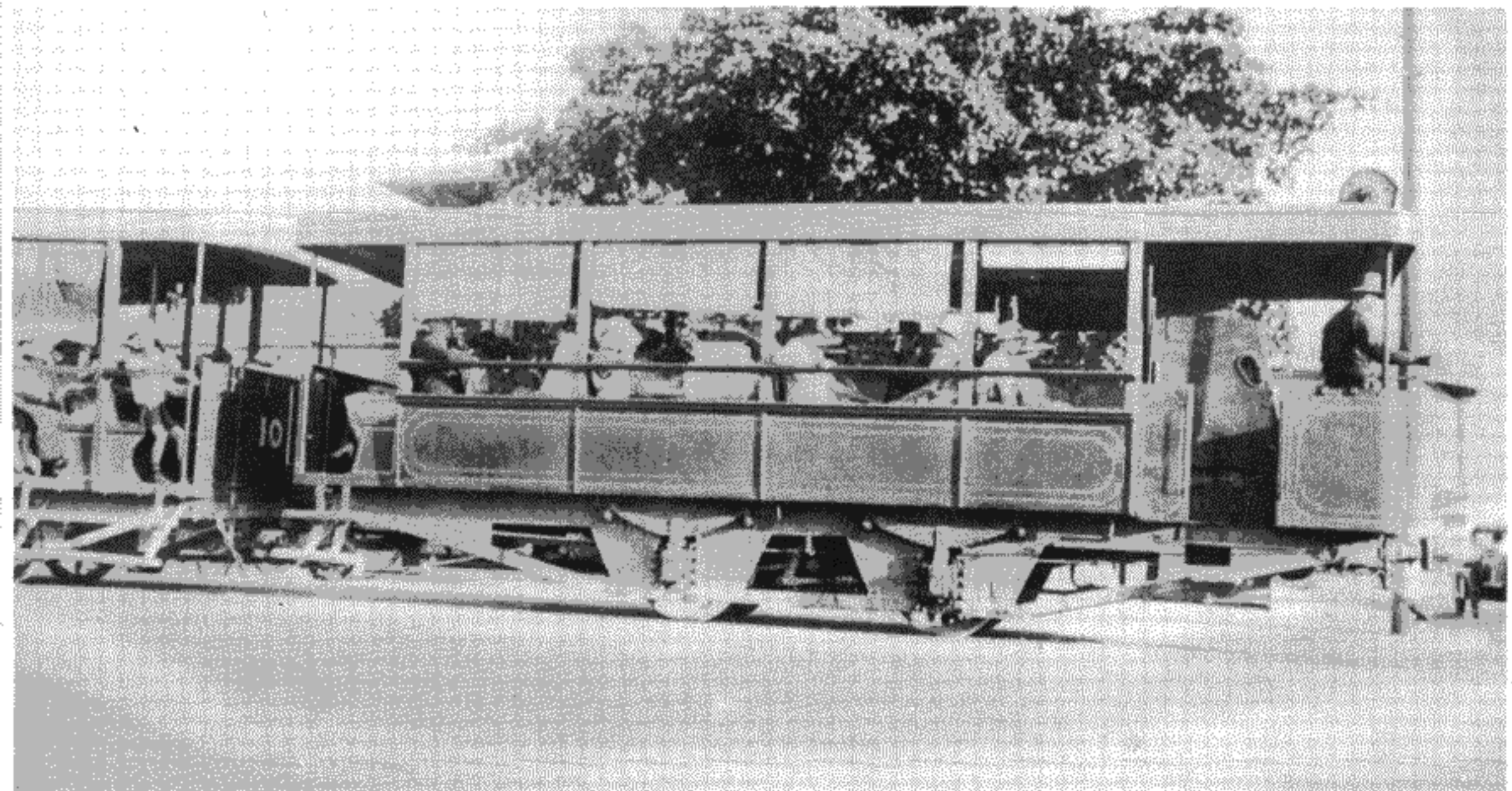
*Art Deco versus Art Nouveau . . . Purrey steam tram No. 7 built in 1912 at the close of the art nouveau era, steams past the art deco Commonwealth Bank building in Rockhampton about 1936.*

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*Purrey steam car No. 4 in its final form with the offside enclosed, circa 1938.*

*C. THOMAS COLLECTION*



*Steam car 5 and trailer No. 10 in William Street, Rockhampton, circa 1934.*

*B. WILES FROM C. THOMAS COLLECTION*

dismantled as they moved from the location to another over the intervening 37 years.

Part of trailer 10 and motor 5 were later found at Seeonee Park while 2 inch transmission chains, brake gear, the front apron and canopy from motor No. 9 were located at Milman. At Dawson Dell the National Trust group excavated a flue casing, boiler parts and crank case shields from a farm junk heap.

Further publicity at that time resulted in a considerable number of phone calls being received providing further clues to relics. The most interesting items located were sets of trailer seats, complete with seat ends, used as verandah benches in local residences. A major discovery occurred during November 1976 when a complete tram boiler was located at Callide near Biloela.

The National Trust group at that time stored these relics in a shed at the Showgrounds and over \$1,000 had been raised towards the eventual restoration of a tram and trailer.

The 75th anniversary of the Rockhampton Council Transport Department has again raised interest in the tramways of the city. At the ball on 8 June the restoration project was officially launched with the aim of having a tram and trailer available for operation by the bi-centenary of 1988.

The project has been assisted by the recent retrieval of an engine unit from the Queensland Government Railways Purrey car by the Antique

Machinery Restoration Society at Ipswich. This group has expressed willingness to make this valuable item available to the Rockhampton project.

A Steering Committee has been formed to direct the project and as the Queensland relics appear to be the only remaining of the 200 steam cars built by the Purrey factory in Bordeaux, France, the project has international significance.

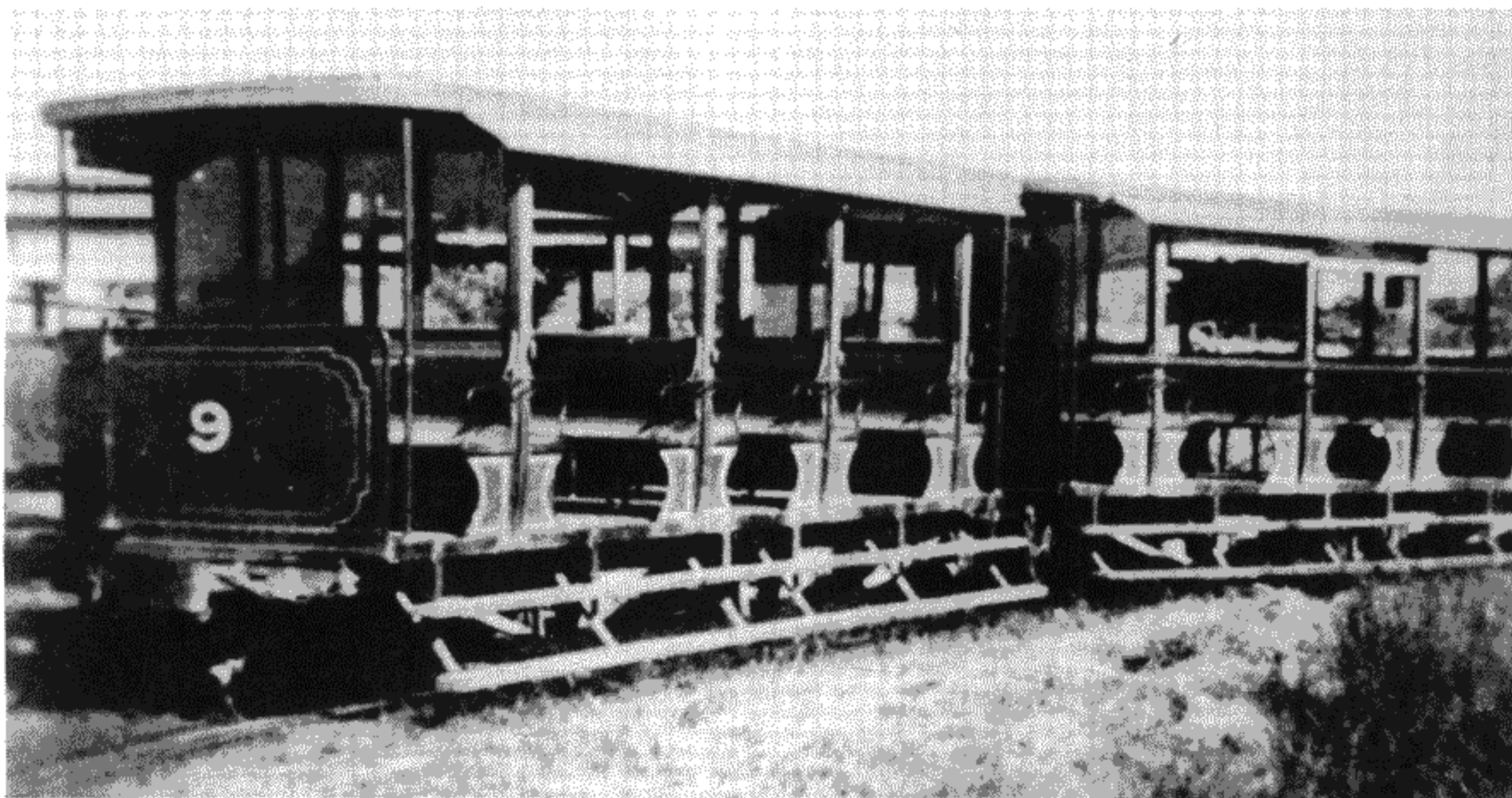
Since our reports of the early 1970s much of the remaining street tramway track has been lifted from the roads of Rockhampton. The city is fortunate, however, in having double tracks of railway laid along a kilometre of Denison Street to street tramway standards which, no doubt, would be made available for steam tramway operation on special occasions.

Readers who have information concerning the location of items which would assist this reconstruction project should contact:—

Mr Doug Press,  
Passenger Transport Manager,  
Rockhampton City Council,  
Post Office Box 243,  
ROCKHAMPTON, Qld 4700

or

Mr Steve Kele,  
Chairman, Steam Tram Steering Committee,  
62 Wandal Road,  
ROCKHAMPTON Qld 4700



*Open cross bench trailer cars numbers 9 and 11 on the reversing triangle at Canning Street Depot late 1939 after the closure of the Rockhampton tramways.*

*E. LOVEDAY FROM C. THOMAS COLLECTION*