

# Neath Corporation Tramways 1897-1920 — 1

Gordon Tucker

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## The Beginning

Like numerous other towns, Neath had in the last quarter of the 19th century a horse-drawn tramway system, owned and operated by a private company, carrying passengers along a rail track laid in the public roads. Opened in 1875, it ran for a little less than four miles from the terminus in Skewen, through Neath town centre to Villiers Street in Briton Ferry. Either under the statutory authority of the Tramways Act of 1870 (which allowed local authorities to purchase tramways compulsorily after 21 years) or because of financial failure of the tramway company, the Corporation of Neath acquired the tramways by Act of Parliament in 1897 and decided immediately to modernise them. Unlike almost all other towns in this position, they decided against electrification, instead settling for tramcars propelled by gas engines. There was little precedent for this; successful gas trams had been used in Dresden and Dessau in Germany, and some experiments using the same Luhrig system had been tried in Croydon. The Blackpool, St. Annes and Lytham Tramways Co. Ltd. had opened in 1896 with the use of gas trams, but experience of the system was very limited. Thus the Neath Corporation were showing considerable initiative (possibly foolhardiness?) in leasing the operation of their tramway system to the British Gas Traction Co. Ltd. in April 1898. This company was derived directly from the German Luhrig Company and was obtaining its engines from Germany (the Gas Motorenfabrik Deutz of Köln). It was manufacturing the gas trams in England by sub-contract, to the Ashbury Railway Carriage Company of Manchester for the first two or three cars at Blackpool, then to the Lancaster Railway Carriage and Wagon Company for all subsequent cars on the Blackpool line, on the Trafford Park line opened in 1897-8, and on the Neath Corporation Tramways. The fuel used in the gas trams was ordinary town gas, stored under pressure in cylinders on the tramcar.

As part of the modernisation of the tramway system, the track was relaid by the contractors Krauss of Bristol, starting in March 1898, with the addition of many crossing loops, giving a total of twelve crossing places, including the termini. (It is believed that there had been only three on the horse tramway). The details are shown in the accompanying map. The reconstruction was complete by October 1898, but in October 1899 the Corporation were complaining of poor track. Krauss's response was that the Corporation was to blame for insisting on re-using the old setts to save money. The track was of 4ft 8½in gauge.

Now the situation was that the Corporation owned the track and maintained a small staff to look after it, but the actual running of the tram service was leased to the British Gas Traction Company. However, the company could not provide a gas tram service immediately; they said in June 1898 that they had four gas trams ready and four on order, but that they could not operate them because the Corporation had not laid on a gas supply at the depot. The Corporation denied this, but the fact remained that the service had to be provided by horse trams until August 1899. The company had not wished to be associated with the horse trams, but as they had accepted the operating lease, the Corporation compelled them to run horse trams until the gas trams were ready. Just who was to blame for the delay seems impossible now to determine. Problems arose over the stabling of the horses while the depot was being altered to suit the gas trams.

Even according to the estimates, the new tramway system was not expected to be very profitable; it was stated that £29,195 had been borrowed to acquire and reconstruct the tramways, with an expected annual working expense of £2,778 and an expected annual income of £3,119, giving an average annual profit of only £476.

There had been much dissatisfaction at the delays in getting the gas tram service; but in late August 1899 there were several trial trips, and on 29 August 1899 Col. Sir Francis Marindin inspected the system on behalf of the Board of Trade, and found everything generally satisfactory. He considered 10 miles/h might be allowed between Court Herbert Colliery Bridge and Glynleiros Gate on the Swansea road, and between Ynismaerdy Road crossing and Penrhiewtyn House on the Briton Ferry Road, but elsewhere a maximum of 8 miles/h, with a restriction to 6 miles/h down Skewen Church Hill. He wanted compulsory steps in Angel Street before crossing the Parade, before crossing the junction of Green Street with New Street, in London Road before crossing The Rope Walk, and in Briton Ferry Road before crossing the junction of Payne Street and Marshfield Road.

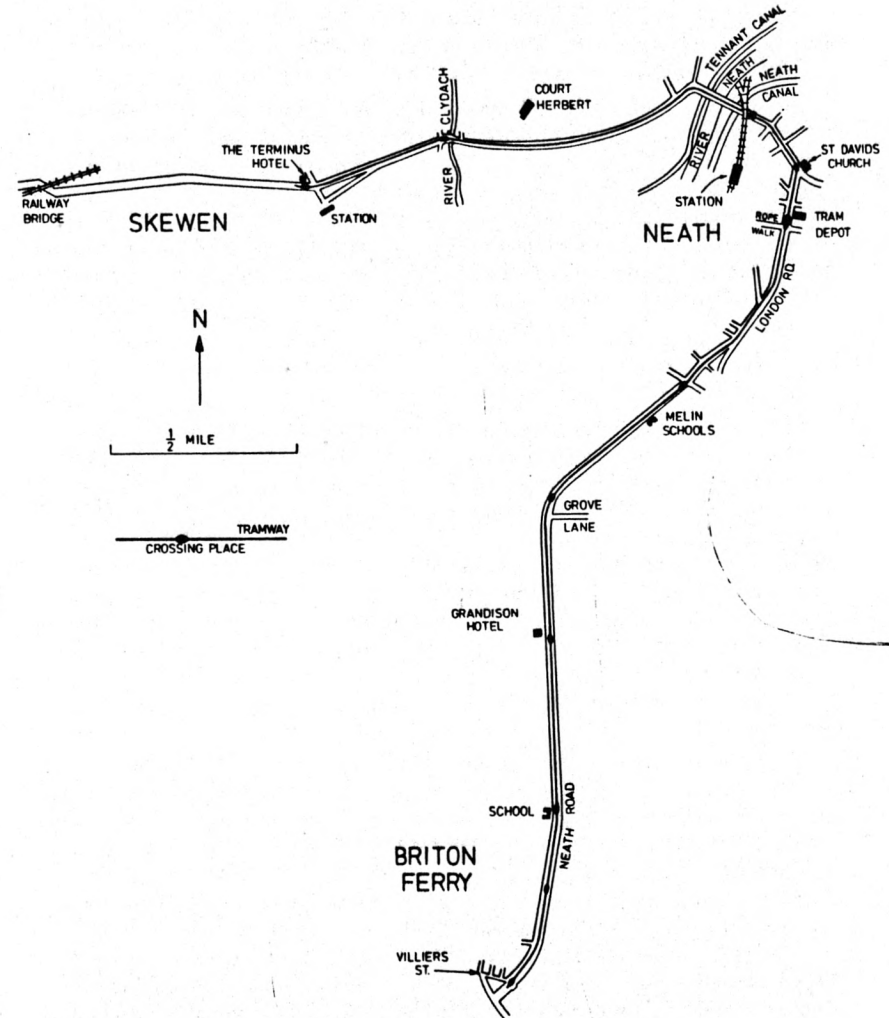
Then at last the official day of opening arrived: 31 August 1899. A quotation of part of the report in the *Neath Gazette* may be of interest:—

#### MOTOR CARS FOR NEATH

A successful inauguration

On Wednesday afternoon a trial trip of the new gas motor cars which are to supersede the indifferent service which has been too long endured, took place at Neath. The Neath Town Council can claim credit as being the first municipal body which has adopted the new system introduced by the British Gas Traction Co. Ltd. A splendid permanent way has been laid by Mr. Krauss of Bristol, and this and the car service were inspected and approved by an official from the Board of Trade earlier in the week. So satisfied was he that it is understood that with the certificate to be forwarded in due course, there shall be a recommendation that the travelling speed of 8 miles per hour shall be conceded. This is more than has been granted to Blackpool or Trafford Park, where the service has been in use for some time past.

The report then gave a description of the cars, then of the lunch and the many long speeches which followed. However, the full public service did not start immediately even now.



One change which was made with the new service was that trams could stop only at specified places to set down and pick up passengers. "There should be no more panting persons frantically waving handkerchief or gingham, but a calm patient air..." said the *Neath Gazette*.

#### Company Troubles

Unfortunately the British Gas Traction Co. Ltd. got into financial difficulties. The first sign of this was noted by the Tramways Committee as early as December 1898: the Committee had noticed comments adverse to the company in the *East Anglian Daily News* of 1 December 1898, and wrote to the company calling their

attention to this and to the dissatisfaction of the Committee at the absence of progress in working the lines at Neath. By October 1899 the Town Clerk reported that the company was to be wound up. The *Electrical Engineer* suggested reasons:—

“We are sorry to see that a winding-up order has been made against the British Gas Traction Company Limited, as we believe that the company has made strenuous efforts to perfect the use of gas engines for tramway work.... Personally we are inclined to believe that (the company's failure) is due to the excessive cost of maintenance of plant which prevents progress. It is interesting in this respect to note that the Gas Tram Company of Blackpool are seeking Parliamentary powers to double their lines and to introduce the overhead trolley system.... This supports our above contention”.

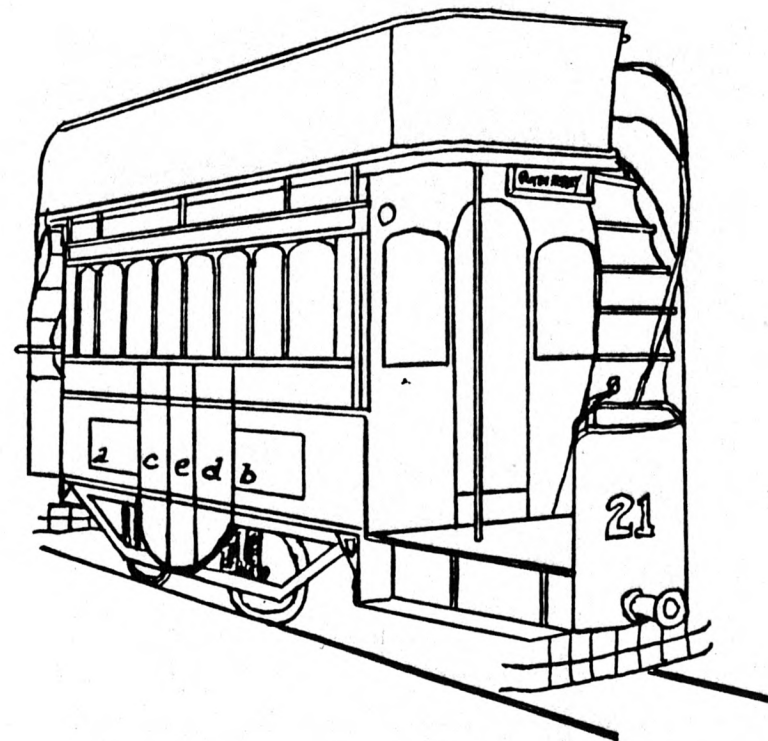
The ever-ambitious British Electric Traction Co. Ltd. (which was providing electric tramways as near as Swansea) immediately tried to become involved with the Neath Tramways, but the Committee refused to meet them.

The former Secretary of British Gas Traction, Percy Holyoake, was appointed liquidator of the company. The Corporation threatened to determine the lease unless a better service of cars was provided. However, nothing seemed to happen for some time. In April 1901, another company—the Traction Company of the UK Ltd—proposed to take over the Neath tramways. They argued that the present service of trams was inadequate, and the only hope of profit was to improve the service; at the same time the Corporation should reduce the charge for gas from 3s 2d to 2s 2d per thousand cu.ft. and should also reduce the annual rent for the tramway lease from £1,300 to £800. If the Corporation would do this, the company would double the service and charge only 1d all the way between Skewen and Briton Ferry. But the Corporation were not interested. Perhaps another solution was already in their minds.

Matthew Whittington was Manager of the tramways. He was apparently negotiating later in 1901 to take over the tramways himself, forming a local company to provide the finance. The British Gas Traction Company owed the Corporation £304.11s.0d, and on 5 December 1901 Whittington agreed to pay this if the Corporation would assign the lease to his Neath Gas Traction Co. Ltd. This was agreed at the beginning of 1902 on a basis of renewal for seven and/or fourteen years after the expiry of the present lease. By the end of the year the company was called the Provincial Gas Traction Co. Ltd, which it remained until its demise in 1916. Its lease was renewed in July 1905, on the same terms it is believed, although there were grumbles; it was renewed again in July 1912, but not without an effort on the part of the Corporation to take over direct control of the tramways, but the company's terms for surrendering the lease were prohibitive. However, by 1916 the company was bankrupt and the Corporation at last obtained the direct control they desired.

#### Description of the Gas Trams

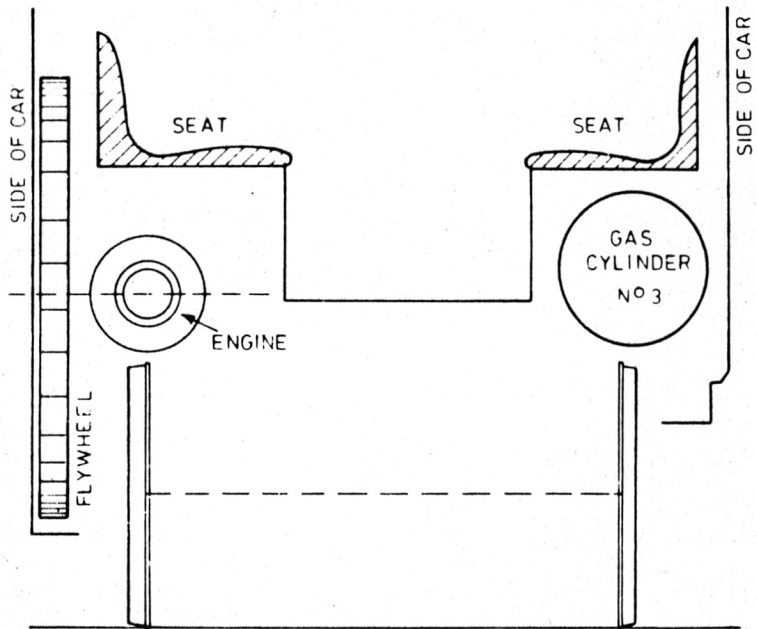
The accompanying sketch shows the general appearance of one of the gas trams, while in the diagrams I have endeavoured to indicate the layout of the engine and gas storage cylinders in as simple a manner as possible. The data is based on published accounts of the gas trams used at Blackpool, but it is believed that the



Rough sketch showing the general appearance of a Neath gas tram. The panels on the side of the tram open outwards; panels a and b are hinged on their lower edge and provide access to the engine cylinders; panels c, d, and e open on vertical hinges to expose the flywheel. (This sketch is based partly on the photograph reproduced on page 83 and partly on a photograph of a Trafford Park gas tram reproduced in "Trafford Park Tramways" by E. Gray).

trams at Neath were identical. There is a strong local tradition that the Neath trams actually came from Blackpool after the gas trams ceased to be used there. However, this could not have applied to the earliest ones (this is discussed later on). There is also another complication in that two people with recollections of the gas trams at Neath, when interviewed by Mr. Harry Green, independently referred to two sizes of tram.

The Otto-type gas engine was a horizontally-opposed twin-cylinder engine which could lie comfortably below the longitudinal seat down one side of the car. The large flywheel was encased, but the casing was very evident in the exterior view of the car. There were three gas-storage cylinders, two hung transversely between the frames, and one longitudinally, under the other passenger seat. There was a mass of gearing between the axles. As the engines were water-cooled, there was a water tank on the roof. At the normal 260 rev/min the rating was 14 hp. For economy, the engine could run on one cylinder when the load or gradient permitted. When idling,



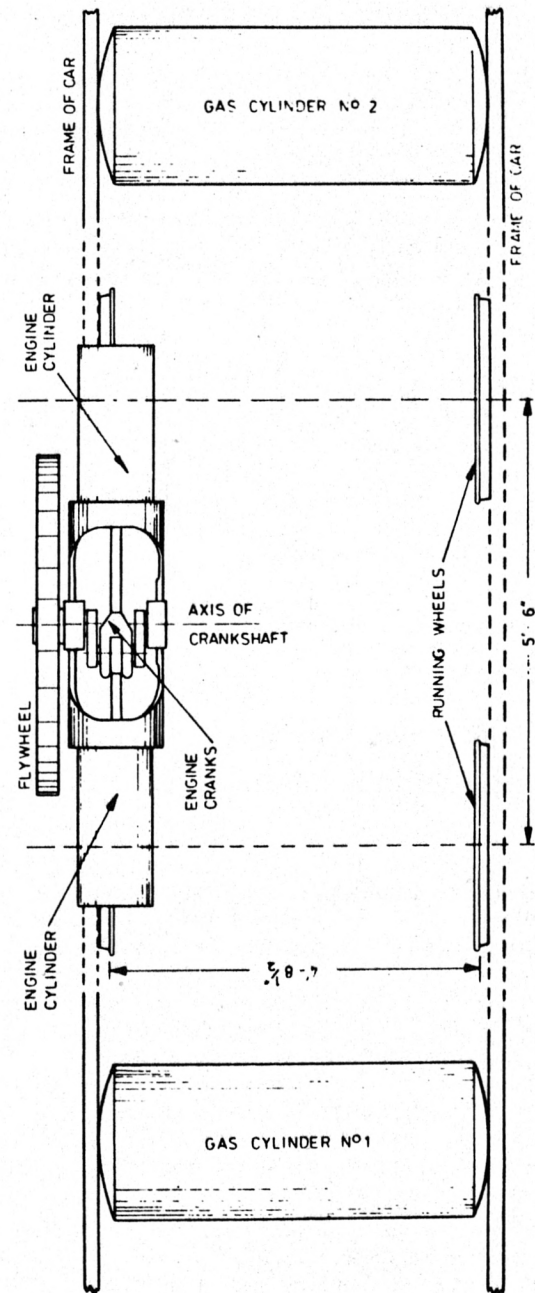
Outline cross-sectional elevation of lower part of gas tramcar.

again one cylinder was cut out, and the speed brought down to about 75 rev/min. Clutches enabled one of two gear trains to be engaged, one intended to drive the car at up to about 4 miles/h, the other up to about 8½. Gas was stored in the three cylinders at an initial pressure of about 150 lb/in², the charging being done outside the depot by means of a flexible hose, the time required being about one minute. One charge sufficed for one complete double journey. The trams carried 52 passengers, probably 20 inside and 32 on the top deck, and weighed 7½ tons.

**Troubles with the Service**

It quickly became clear that the gas trams did not give ideal service. As early as February 1900, the writer of "Neath Notes" in the *Neath Gazette* complained thus:—

"The recent eccentric movements, with many intermittent stoppages, of these motor freaks, have called forth a great deal of indignation from a patient public who suffer from the delays en route, the lack of punctuality, the abandonment of stated service, etc. Of course, there will be nothing done unless this matter of serious public inconvenience is brought into prominent notice, and it is doubtful, even then, if the Town Council will budge from the position of seeming indifference. But if nothing is done to remedy the present unsatisfactory state of things, matters will go from bad to worse, and what was intended to be for the public service will become a nuisance, and of no general utility".



Outline plan of lower part of gas tramcar.

We have already noted that the Corporation had complained to the British Gas Traction Company. What is perhaps more surprising is that in February 1900 the Corporation received a letter of complaint about excessive speed and consequent accidents. There were complaints about boys clambering on to tramcars for unofficial rides; the danger was pointed out to schoolmasters and parents. A variation on the theme was the pelting by boys of the conductors at Briton Ferry.

Attention was called in 1905 to the overcrowding of the trams; it was a recurrent theme. Another complaint was the lack of information about timetables, and changes in the frequency of the service. For instance, in May 1913 the Corporation requested the company to post timetable notices in cars and elsewhere—"No Time Tables appear to have been printed for a long while". The printed notice which resulted read thus:—

"Provincial Gas Traction Co. Ltd.  
ALTERATION OF TRAM SERVICE

The LAST CARS will leave the Square (Neath) at 10.30pm on all days except Saturday.

The cars will run every Fifteen Minutes on the following days:—

Wednesdays, from 10am; Friday, from 6pm; Saturday, from 2pm".

This rather curious notice certainly left one guessing what the service was at other times!

A most important document was prepared by the Borough Engineer in July 1913—a full report on the working of the tramways. This is so informative that it is reproduced in full below:—

WORKING OF TRAMWAYS

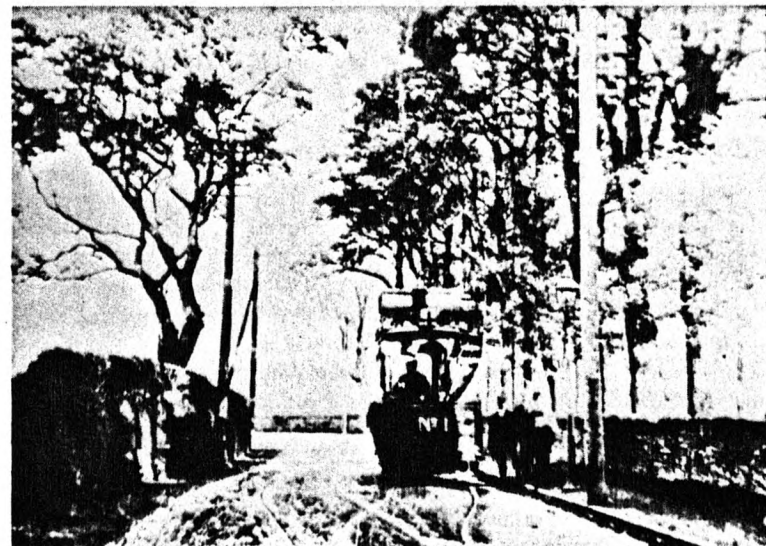
As requested, I now beg to submit my report upon what has been done by the Lessees to meet the requirements laid down on behalf of the Corporation.

*As to Service of Cars.* A 15 minutes Service is now being run on Wednesdays, from 10am, on Fridays, from 6pm, and on Saturdays, from 7pm. The last cars leave the Square every night, excepting Saturdays, at 10.30pm. To this extent, therefore, the Lessees have complied with the requirements as to Service. No permanent alteration, however, has been made in the time of departure of the last car on Saturday nights. The Manager states that he finds 11.15pm quite late enough, and that on occasions when he has had cars ready at a later time, there has proved to be no demand for them. Saturday the 19th of this month is instanced, when an additional car was got ready to leave at 11.20, and there were no intending passengers. It is stated on behalf of the Lessees that they are quite prepared to and will run later cars whenever they find there is likely to be a demand. No detailed proposals to meet the requirement as to a greater number and frequency of cars on special occasions have been submitted by the Lessees, and think it would be advisable that they should be again formally asked to do this.

With reference to overcrowding: It is stated that the adoption of the accelerated service has considerably reduced the overcrowding which previously occurred, and so far as I can ascertain, the Statement is to some extent justified. I have not for



Neath Corporation gas-engined tramcars in service. Above: the crew pose on the platform of No. 21; the side opening panels and the curved lower edge covering the flywheel can be seen. Below: No. 1 negotiates the passing loop at the "Banana Island", Neath Abbey Road. Both photographs are from prints in the collection of the Neath Antiquarian Society and are reproduced by courtesy of the Society.



some time heard of any serious overcrowding; but this of course is a matter to be kept in sight, and I will report on same later.

*As to State of Cars.* The several cars are now being overhauled, in turn, and it is stated that all of the requirements of the Corporation will be complied with. I have inspected the work in progress, and find that steps are being taken to make the Cars watertight; to prevent draughts through the sashes and the rattling of same (by means of rubber strips); to reduce the smell complained of; to clean down, redecorate and re-upholster the Cars; and to generally overhaul the gearing and working parts. The Manager has found difficulty in getting painters experienced on this class of work, but it appears to be now well under way.

As to the cleaning of the Cars: I consider there has been a distinct improvement. The floors, which are constructed in sections, are taken out every few days as required, and washed down; and if this practice is maintained, and the dusting of the cars thoroughly carried out, I think the requirement under the head of cleaning will have been fairly met. It will no doubt be desirable, however, that a further report should be made as to this later in the year.

As to the artificial lighting of the Cars, what appears to be required is the prompt renewal of spent or defective mantles, and this, I believe, is now being better attended to.

*As to the efficiency of Cars:* The overhauling of the gearing of the cars, which appears to be badly needed, will no doubt improve the efficiency of the Cars. I am told that the suggestions of the Corporation under this head are being complied with as far as practicable, but I have not yet been able to personally verify this, and will report after I have had an opportunity of further looking into same.

*Generally:* I am assured every effort is being made by the Lessees to meet the requirements of the Corporation. I may say that, among other things, I have called the attention of the Lessees to some inefficient boy-conductors employed by them, and am informed that the matter is receiving their attention.

I am Gentlemen,  
Your obedient servant,  
D. M. Jenkins,  
Borough Engineer.

This report makes it clear that the Provincial Gas Traction Company was allowing the tramway system to run down in several ways, particularly as regards the maintenance of the cars. These were now about 14 years old, and we have already noted an opinion of 1899 that they required a lot of maintenance.

However, it was not only the company which was allowing things to run down. We have observed that the Corporation were responsible for the track, and this had also deteriorated. In July 1915 the Borough Engineer reported that as a result of a recent inspection of the track he thought his previously-recommended reconstructions could be postponed for a year (a wartime economy perhaps?), but that:—

“We are now proceeding with tightening up of loose rail joints and urgent repairs, and if due attention is paid by the Lessees to the cleaning of rail grooves and points, to keeping the springs and gearing of the Cars in efficient working

order, and to the selection and supervision of drivers, there is no reason why the excessive oscillation of the Cars (which is due primarily to their short wheel bases) should not be materially reduced....”

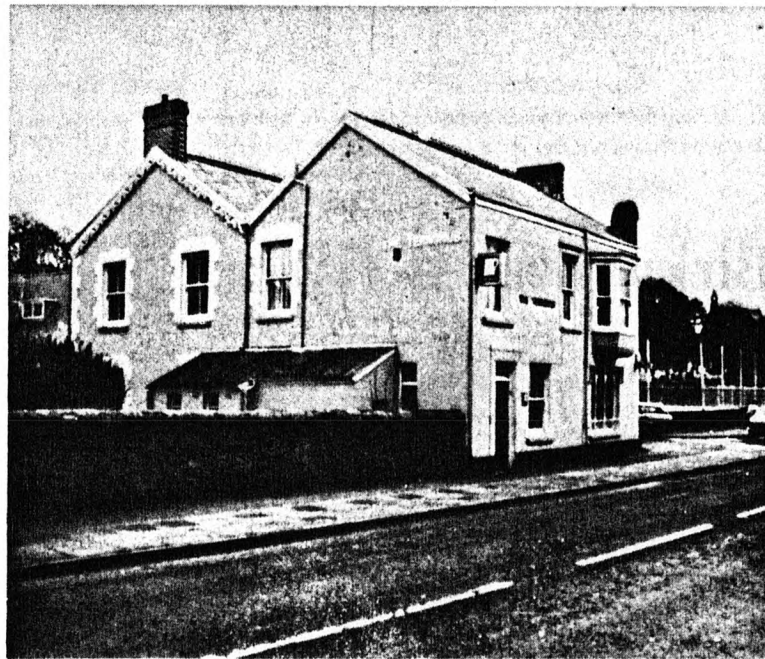
In November 1915 there was a derailment near Glynleiros, as a car was entering the points of the passing place. The Borough Engineer attributed the cause to (1) excessive speed (“which is a frequent occurrence”), (2) the grooves of the rails being practically filled up with dirt, and (3) the worn rims of the car wheels.

It will be observed that the Corporation managed to put most of the blame in these matters on to the company. There was probably genuine justification in this, as the company which had been so uppish with the Corporation when the latter had wanted to take over the lease in 1912 was already getting into difficulties. Why this was so is not clear, and it was still early for wartime difficulties to have become a major factor.

#### **Finance and the Collapse of the Company**

At the time of renewal of the lease in 1912, the company had evidently been doing well, for it requested the new lease at the same rent and with the same conditions as before, and was unwilling to surrender the lease on any reasonable terms.

*To be concluded*



The Terminus public-house, marking the former tram-terminus at Skewen. This photograph was taken by the author in 1979.

# Neath Corporation Tramways 1897-1920—2

Gordon Tucker

The Corporation, too, were doing quite well. The last year's revenue account before the war of 1914 is reproduced below, and shows a healthy balance of £705 on the year's working. But at an interview between Whittington (the company's Manager and principal executive) and the Tramways Committee on 8 May 1916, the latter were informed that the company had been endeavouring to sell its assets to the South Wales Transport Co. Ltd., but without success, and now proposed that it

## NEATH CORPORATION TRAMWAYS REVENUE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 1914

	£	s	d	£	s	d
To salaries— E. C. Curtis, Clerk	25	0	0			
Ifor Thomas, Treasurer	5	0	0			
E. J. Rees, Asst. Surveyor	18	4	0			
Jones & Lewis, Auditors	2	2	0			
Employers' Contribution—						
Insurance Act	9	4	4			
				50	10	4
To Repairs, Labour, Wages, etc	249	5	0			
,, Castings & Smithwork	112	14	7			
,, Pitch and Cement	70	13	8			
,, Haulage	42	6	0			
				474	19	3
To Printing and Stationery	5	6	3			
To Income Tax	0	14	0			
To Bank Interest	0	16	7			
				6	16	10
Balance carried to Profit & Loss Account				705	17	4
				1,238	3	9
By Provincial Gas Traction Co. Ltd 1 year's rent to 31 March 1914	1,224	3	4			
By Sundry Receipts	12	18	8			
By Interest on Credit Balance	1	1	9			
	1,238	3	9			

should surrender its lease to the Corporation and hand over the whole of its rolling stock and effects to the Corporation, the latter to pay £197.10s.1d., to enable it to pay off trade creditors. So the company had collapsed completely. The Town Council empowered the Tramways Committee to take over the working of the tramways, and the system became wholly municipal as from 10 June 1916. The extent to which the company had run down can be gauged from the fact that only three cars were running, and a half-hour service was being provided.

The Corporation went very fully into the question of electrification, engaging Arthur Ellis of Cardiff as Consulting Engineer. There were a number of difficulties, physical, administrative and financial, and the cost was going to be heavy. It was proposed to extend the system from Skewen to the Swansea Borough boundary, presumably to join up with the Swansea tramway system. Electricity was a problem; the public supply was in the hands of the Rural District Council who wanted to charge 2¼d per unit subject to fuel and labour cost additions, and Ellis thought it would be cheaper to generate their own. Then trolleybuses were considered as a much cheaper alternative to a new tramway system. In the end, however, the Corporation gave up completely and accepted as permanent the petrol omnibus service provided by the South Wales Transport Company, operating at 25-minute intervals between 8.0am and 10.30pm, which had commenced on Monday, 9 August 1920, ostensibly as a temporary service.

While all the negotiations regarding electrification were going on, from early in 1919, the Corporation had kept hoping to be able to arrange a temporary motor omnibus service so that they could discontinue the struggle to maintain a gas tram service. For some reason, however, they failed to make suitable arrangements for nearly 18 months, and the tramway appears to have staggered on until 8 August 1920, when it was finally abandoned, no doubt with as great rejoicing as had accompanied its inauguration in 1899! It seems doubtful if the Corporation really maintained any serious intention to build an electric system once the buses had started running. The case for a tramway had already been lost.

### Post-1916

The Corporation took over a virtually worn-out fleet of tramcars. By "cannibalising" some to provide parts for others, a minimal service was maintained; for example, in December 1918, car 19 had defective tyres and car 22 had leaky gas holders; so the tyres of No. 22 were fitted to No. 19 so that one of these two cars could be used. By such means a total of four cars were kept in use, although the service provided to the public was infrequent: a "2-car service" up to 2.00pm, and a "3-car service" thereafter, corresponding presumably to intervals of about 45 minutes and 30 minutes respectively.

Fares were increased, but the tramway remained unprofitable—not surprising in view of the poor service and the difficulty of maintaining sufficient cars in working order. In March 1919 the Corporation wrote to the Board of Trade:—

"... The mechanism of the cars has become so badly worn and there is so much trouble with Gas Holders, Wheels and Engine Cylinders that the costs of running are becoming prohibitive.... the whole position is a very precarious one. It has for some time been found impracticable to run a regular service owing to continued breakdowns.

The Corporation are considering the reconstruction and electrical equipment of the line.... but in the meantime the Corporation beg to be relieved of the obligation of continuing the present service.... it seems to be beyond the powers of the Corporation to maintain the present cars in running order after the next two months'.

The Board of Trade replied that they had no power to relieve the Corporation of their obligations.

#### Number and Sources of Tramcars

During the period of direct municipal operation of the tramway, we find in the minutes various references to individual cars by number, from No. 1 to No. 23, although the majority of intermediate numbers are not mentioned. It is, however, a reasonable assumption that over the years of gas-tram services a total of at least 23 different gas-powered tramcars had been possessed. That the lower numbers did apply to gas-trams, and not to the earlier horse-trams, is quite definite, since Nos. 1 and 2 were still running in 1916.

There is a strong tradition that Neath obtained its tramcars secondhand from Blackpool, although there is some disagreement as to when, and sources of the information are never quoted. For example, W. Oak in "Old Neath: a symposium" stated that "in 1897 gas trams were purchased from Blackpool Corporation", and Bett and Gillham in "Great British Tramway Networks" stated that "at the foot of the Vale of Neath there formerly operated the standard-gauge Neath Corporation tramways, using gas-engined cars of double-deck open-top type obtained second-hand from the Blackpool, St. Anne's and Lytham Tramways Co. in 1903..." The former statement cannot be correct, as there were no gas trams in Neath before 1899, and Blackpool Corporation never owned any anyway. The latter statement is very misleading, but nevertheless could possibly be correct, although I have found no direct evidence in minutes or newspapers or the technical journals. I will review the circumstantial evidence.

First, it appears probable that the British Gas Traction Co. Ltd. started the service at Neath with eight brand-new cars in 1899, according to the statements discussed at the beginning of this article. These would have been sufficient to maintain a 15-minute service with perhaps one or two cars to spare.

Secondly, the Blackpool, St. Anne's and Lytham Tramways service was inaugurated on 11 July 1896 with three cars built by the Ashbury Railway Carriage Company of Manchester, although a report in "The Engineer" in September that year referred to "the two cars now in use on the line" which would be increased to 20 next season. These first cars were 40-seaters, but all subsequent cars seated 52. In May 1897, 12 more cars were on order for the Blackpool line. In July 1899 it was stated in "The Engineer": "In 1897, 20 cars of 14 hp were built at Lancaster and are still at work on the Blackpool, St. Anne's and Lytham Tramways Co. Ltd., and on the Trafford Park Tramways". Now it is understood that four gas trams were used on the Trafford Park Tramways (E. Gray, "Trafford Park Tramways"). We are therefore left with a guess at the total number of gas trams at Blackpool of between 14 and 19.

Thirdly, the gas trams were unlikely to have been augmented in number at Blackpool after 1899, as in 1901 an Act was obtained to electrify the line, and the electric service was opened in June 1903. The gas trams were thus made redundant then.

Fourthly, severe damage was done at Blackpool by a freak hurricane on 27 February 1903, and "the greatest damage... has been to the Lytham and St. Anne's Company's tramshed at Squires Gate. The building has been completely wrecked.... Twelve of the Company's trams which were housed within the building were buried in a mass of debris..." (*Blackpool Gazette*).

So we finally reach the conclusion that a stock of between 14 and 19 unwanted gas trams, many of which had probably been seriously damaged, was available at Blackpool in 1903, probably at a knock-down price, and must have been tempting as a source of reserve cars and/or spare parts to the operating company at Neath. What more likely, therefore, that they (or most of them) were bought by the Neath Company, this explaining both the tradition and the apparently extravagant number of cars on the books at Neath. It is known that the Neath Company was still interested in acquiring spare parts in 1908, for it made enquiries when the Trafford Park gas trams were scrapped in that year.

#### Surviving Indications of the Tramway

As far as I could detect, the only surviving indications of the one-time existence of the tramway are: (1) The Terminus public-house at Skewen, which stands at the point where the original horse-tramway terminated and must therefore have taken its name from the tramway; and (2) a petrol station and car showroom (now disused) on the site of the tramway depot at the junction of Cresswell Road with London Road, Neath; Mr. Harry Green thinks that two of the walls of this building incorporate parts of the walls of the old depot.