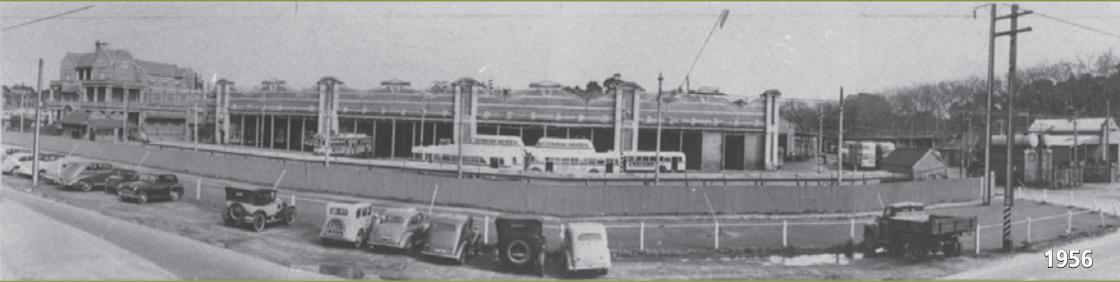




State Herbarium  
of South Australia



1956



1982



2016

# The Old Tram Barn

A short history of Tram Barn A,  
now housing the State Herbarium of South Australia



## A new era of public transport for Adelaide

Tram Barn A, a building once so important to the maintenance of South Australia's tram fleet, was transformed from a 'blot on the landscape' to a busy herbarium situated in the beautiful Adelaide Botanic Garden. Tram Barn A now houses more than a million plant herbarium specimens and scientific and technical staff of South Australia's Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.

Adelaide was the first Australian capital to establish a system of street tramways, and for many years it enjoyed the distinction of having the most complete and convenient arrangements for passenger traffic of any city south of the equator. The first trams were horse-drawn and were

the source of much pride when they began running in the late 1870s. Every major suburb was connected by over 70 miles (113 km) of rail. However, over time and with advances in technology, other state capitals began investing in better public transport systems as well. Adelaide citizens were increasingly aware of '*an unpleasant sensation of being at the rear*'. Citizens were compelled to apologise to visitors for their '*smelly and uncomfortable*' trams (Cyclopedia of South Australia, 1909, Vol. 2, pp. 200–202).

When the Western Australian mining town Kalgoorlie launched a new electric tramway in 1902, Adelaide citizens had had enough! Mr William G.T. Goodman (later Sir) was appointed as Chief Engineer in 1907 with the task of electrifying Adelaide's tramways. Disagreement between Mr Goodman and the Adelaide City Council occurred. In fact, the process became embroiled in controversy as a result of Mr Goodman's proposals to open the grassed city squares and sacrosanct parklands, and to remove



1908—during original construction.

150 trees (Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1966, Vol. 9, pp. 48–49) and siting the new Municipal Tramways Trust administrative building and tram barns in the parklands along Hackney Road; then being used as Experimental Government Orchard.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1909, the new system was inaugurated '*amid public rejoicings*'—with the exception of the Lord Mayor of Adelaide. At that time only the administrative block (now the Goodman Building) and Tram Barn A were ready for the launch. Adjoining Barn A was an accommodation block with offices, a large mess room fitted with tables, lockers and toilet facilities, club room, library, machine room and store room. The remaining three barns were progressively added, each separated by reinforced concrete walls as a precaution against fire, to form one large running shed. At the rear of the barns other supporting facilities were built, including a paint shop, car building shop, machine shop, wheel store and smithy. Two houses were also built for principal foremen who needed to be on-call at short notice.

Tram Barn A (and all other associated buildings including the administrative building now known as the 'Goodman Building') were originally designed by Mr H.E. Sibley and Mr C.W. Wooldridge under the general direction and engineering input of Goodman. The construction was carried out by Smith, Timms and Co. It was constructed using English bond brickwork, corrugated iron gable and saw-toothed roofs on steel trusses and granite plinths. The dark red brickwork contrasts with rendered details, bands and decorations with pseudo-classical details and mouldings used as accents (Register of State Heritage Items, IES/05/301182). The buildings are considered to represent a high standard of Edwardian utilitarian design.

The Hackney Depot was the main centre of



1982—clock at Running Shed A.

electric tramway operations from 1908 to 1958. From 1925 onwards changes were introduced, and after 1953 a progressive conversion from trams to buses occurred. Subsequently a major portion of the running shed was demolished to make room for buses.

In 1985 a section of the western area of the site was resumed for Botanic Gardens use and this resulted in the demolition of the 1908 servicing bay. The Bicentennial Conservatory was constructed in this location. In 1992 a new bus depot was opened at Mile End and the Hackney depot was closed.

The Hackney Tram Depot buildings were assessed for inclusion on the State Heritage Register in 1982. The Goodman Building, Tram Barn A and the attached amenities building were gazetted on the interim list of the State Heritage Register in 1983. The Goodman Building was included in the City of Adelaide Heritage Register within the Parklands area in 1988. The Running Sheds and Amenities Building were not included. The Goodman Building and Tram Barn



A were included on the Register of the National Estate in 1986. The Goodman Building is classified by the National Trust of Australia.

In 1991 a conservation study of the remaining structures at the Hackney Bus Depot was carried out by McDougall and Vines Architectural and Heritage Consultants for the SA Department of Housing and Construction with a view to determining



The entire tram complex during the 1950s.

## A new destiny for 'Tram Barn A'

future use once the depot was relocated. The main aim was to return the majority of the remaining area occupied by buildings to the Botanic Gardens, and although it was generally agreed that the Goodman Building should be retained, there was some debate as to the fate of Tram Barn A. The conservation study mentions the State Government having made an earlier commitment to the Botanic Gardens Board to demolish what remained of the Running Sheds.

The recommendation of the report however was that it should be retained as the last remaining example of a working building associated with the Adelaide electric tramways system. The final recommendation was that Tram Barn A should be retained as a free standing architectural element and its future adaptation to other appropriate uses.

The case for Tram Barn A's preservation became problematic for a number of reasons. From an architectural and aesthetic perspective, it was seen as a *'blot on the landscape'*, clashing with and imposing on the visual impact of the new Bicentennial

Conservatory. Whilst the Goodman Building was more readily accepted as worthy of retention, the industrial appearance of Barn A tended to polarise views strongly. The Civic Trust of South Australia awarded *'Brickbats'* to it on two separate occasions; one in 1987 for the *'alienation of Parklands by the State Transport Authority in Botanic Park'*, and again in 1995 for the *'retention of Tram Barn A'* and the *'failure to extend the Botanic Gardens to provide the appropriate setting for the Bicentennial Conservatory'* (Australian Planner, 1996, Vol. 33, pp. 153–159), and thereby denying the Conservatory of an award (The City Messenger, 22 Nov 1995).

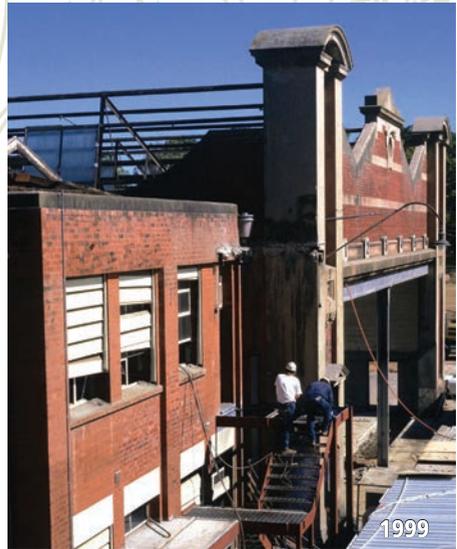
The debate surfaced again in 1997 and became embroiled in the bigger controversy surrounding the proposal to build a National Wine Centre on the former depot site as part of the *'Adelaide Botanic Gardens Wine*



1957—Tram Barn A.

and Roses Precinct' project. Designers of the National Wine Centre were told to 'go back to the drawing board' by the State Government when their first plans involved demolishing the Goodman Building and Tram Barn A. Alternative plans were proposed keeping the Goodman Building and demolishing the Tram barn or keeping both buildings with a separate development for the Wine Centre (The Advertiser, 16 Dec 1997).

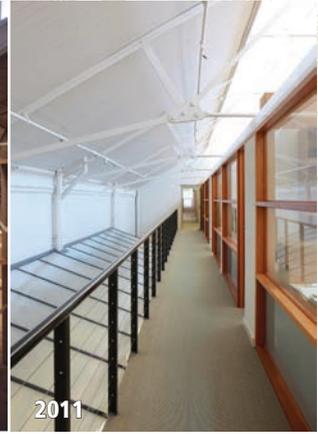
The State Herbarium had very primitive housing in its early history, situated in a converted part of the former hospital annexe buildings, transferred to the Botanic Gardens in the early 1950s. The first purpose-built herbarium building was erected in 1965 in the southeast corner of the Botanic Gardens which was adjacent to the old tram buildings. The herbarium was extended with additional wings in 1980 and 1990. Final plans for the Wine Centre building involved the demolition of the former State Herbarium and Adelaide Botanic Gardens administration buildings on the corner of Botanic and Hackney Roads. The Botanic Gardens relocated their administration



to the Goodman Building and Tram Barn A was extensively refurbished to house the State Herbarium; this was officially re-opened as the Plant Biodiversity Centre on 20 November 1999. Grieve Gillett Architects conceived a design for the Tram Barn that

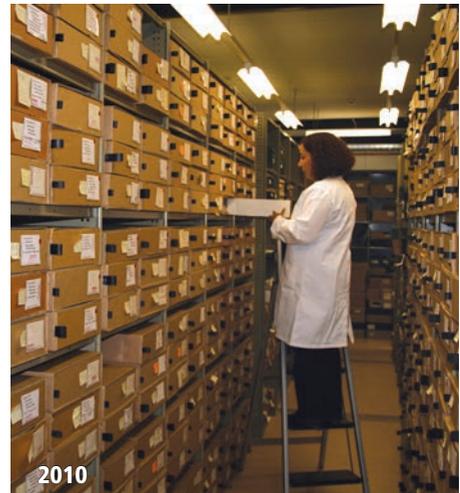


1992—Before the renovations.



recognised and maintained elements of both the industrial look and the sense of space from the original building. Important heritage features were preserved. In particular the Grinnell fire sprinkler systems were retained (as non-functioning features) representing one of the State's earliest applications of what was then a significant new advance in safety technology. The reconstructed Tram Barn A now houses

the collections of the State Herbarium of South Australia along with a large number of scientific staff that support the work of the Herbarium and the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.



# The State Herbarium of South Australia

South Australia's key centre for the preservation and generation of knowledge of native and naturalised plants, algae, lichens and fungi.

Produced by the State Herbarium of South Australia, Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. Photographs, images and artwork by staff, Honorary Research Associates or volunteers of the Herbarium (version March 2016). Layout: A. Boerner, Calyptra Pty Ltd.

## Contacts

e: [stateherbsa@sa.gov.au](mailto:stateherbsa@sa.gov.au)  
w: [flora.sa.gov.au](http://flora.sa.gov.au)  
[environment.sa.gov.au/stateherbarium](http://environment.sa.gov.au/stateherbarium)  
[blog: know.ourplants.org](http://blog.know.ourplants.org)  
m: Chief Botanist  
State Herbarium of South Australia  
GPO Box 1047  
Adelaide SA 5001



**Government  
of South Australia**



*Board of the  
Botanic Gardens and  
State Herbarium*

