

Blackburn and Over Darwen Tramways Co. Ltd.



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Cover Illustration: Green loco No. 12 and Kitson loco No. 3. (LTHL collection).

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The first tramway to operate in the Lancashire towns of Darwen and Blackburn was a single-track steam tramway, owned and operated by the Blackburn and Over Darwen Tramways Company and authorised under the Blackburn and Over Darwen Tramways Act of 1879. It was the first British tramway authorised solely to use steam traction and opened to the public on the 16th April 1881 (although the official opening was carried out two days earlier when the directors of the company, along with civic dignitaries, travelled from the Angel Inn, Darwen to the Blackburn terminus in St. Peter Street).

The tramway ran from the centre of Blackburn, along Darwen Street, Bolton Road, through Ewood, Earcroft, Hawkshaw, to Darwen, terminating at Whitehall, where a reversing triangle was constructed, part of which still exists and has been preserved as an 'ancient monument'. The total route mileage was just over 4.9 miles. The trams were to be operated on behalf of Darwen Corporation, rather than Blackburn, with Blackburn Corporation granting running powers into the Borough.

The six original engines, weighing 5 tons and numbered 1-6, were leased from Messrs Kitson & Co. of Leeds for £1-15s per day, inclusive of drivers' wages. A further engine was added in 1882 and numbered 7. The cars were short, four wheel, open-top, seven window style bodies, built by Ashbury and mounted on Eades patent reversible trucks. They had longitudinal seating for 20 in the lower saloon and transverse knifeboard seating for 26 on top. A single platform with staircase provided access since the cars could be turned at each terminus. The upper deck passengers were protected from the smoke and fumes by a simple screen, extended in 1882 to cover half the top deck.

The livery of the locos and trailers was deep red (or maroon) and cream.

Under the terms of the 1879 Tramways Act the company was required to provide an early morning and evening service for workmen, and this was included on the timetable. However the company did not seem to want workmen travelling in their nice new cars, and these services did not operate. In 1883 the company bought four open cars for the conveyance of workmen, but these proved totally unsuitable in the inclement weather and were only used for one year, after which time the regular cars were substituted.

Like so many companies of the time, the Blackburn and Over Darwen Tramways Company was a law unto itself. It was constantly in trouble with the Council and authorities over vehicle safety, blatantly flouting the law regarding the running of two cars with one locomotive, and was regularly prosecuted by the police for overloading the cars.

Between 1885 and 1896, seven larger engines were purchased from Thomas Green and numbered 8-14. In 1887 the first bogie car was put into service, built by Ashbury with enclosed top-deck and outside staircase, it seated 58. In 1888 a further two enclosed bogie cars were purchased from Milnes, of Birkenhead, from whom all subsequent cars came. A further three engines were purchased from Kitsons in 1897-98 and became numbers 1, 2 and 15.

On the 31st December 1898, under the terms of the 1879 Act, which gave them the option to acquire the undertaking, Blackburn and Darwen purchased the portions of the tramway within their own boundaries. The full agreement being:

1. Darwen to purchase the depot situated in Darwen at a price of £2,000.
2. Blackburn to purchase the stores.
3. Darwen to keep lines in repair within their own Borough for which Blackburn to pay Darwen the sum of £340 per annum.
4. Blackburn to take a lease from Darwen of the line within Darwen for 6 months and then subject to 3 months notice at a rent of £916,10s.d., a sum fixed by an arbitor.
5. Monies paid by the two Corporations, Darwen £26,163; Blackburn £22,337.

Darwen took possession of 10 engines and 10 trailers with Blackburn taking 3 of the Green engines and 3 trailers.

The steam trams continued to run until 1901 when electrification of the former steam lines had been completed.

TRAM FLEET SUMMARY 1881-1889

Locos

This listing is in the format - Year into Stock; Fleet No; Manufacturer

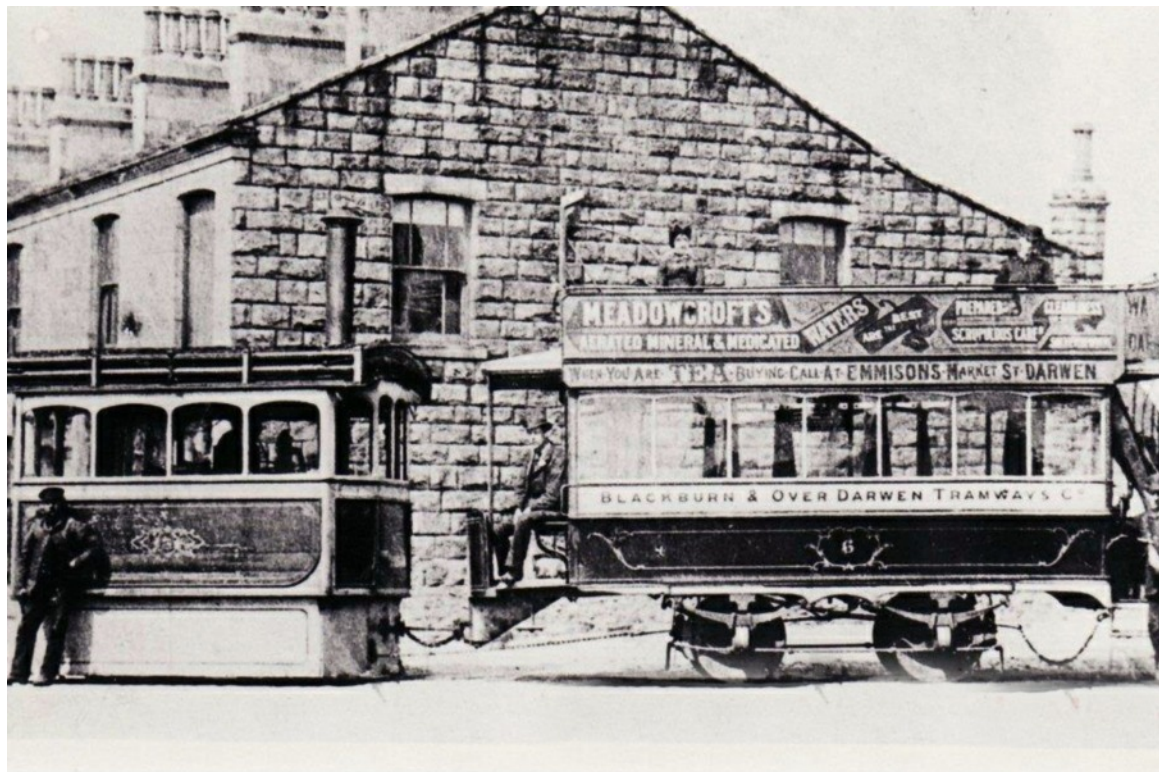
1881; 1-6; Kitson

1882; 7; Kitson

1885-96; 8-14; Green

1897-98; 1,2,15; Kitson

13 of the steam locos (fleet numbers unknown) were taken over by Blackburn and Darwen Corporations on the 1st January 1899. Blackburn took 3 of the Green locos (fleet numbers unknown) and Darwen took the remainder. By this time 4 had been withdrawn, including the original Nos. 1-2, and probably two more from the same batch.



1881 Kitson steam loco No. 3 and Ashbury trailer No. 6 seating 26 on knifeboard seating on the upper deck and 20 in the lower saloon on garden seats. Short canopy top-covers were later fitted. (LTHL collection).

Trailers

This listing is in the format - Year into Stock; Fleet No; Type; Manufacturer; Seating.

1881; 1-8; Double-deck open-top 4-wheel; Ashbury; 26/20

1883; 9-12?; Single-deck open-top 4-wheel; ? ; ?

1887; 9; Double-deck enclosed bogie; Ashbury; 58

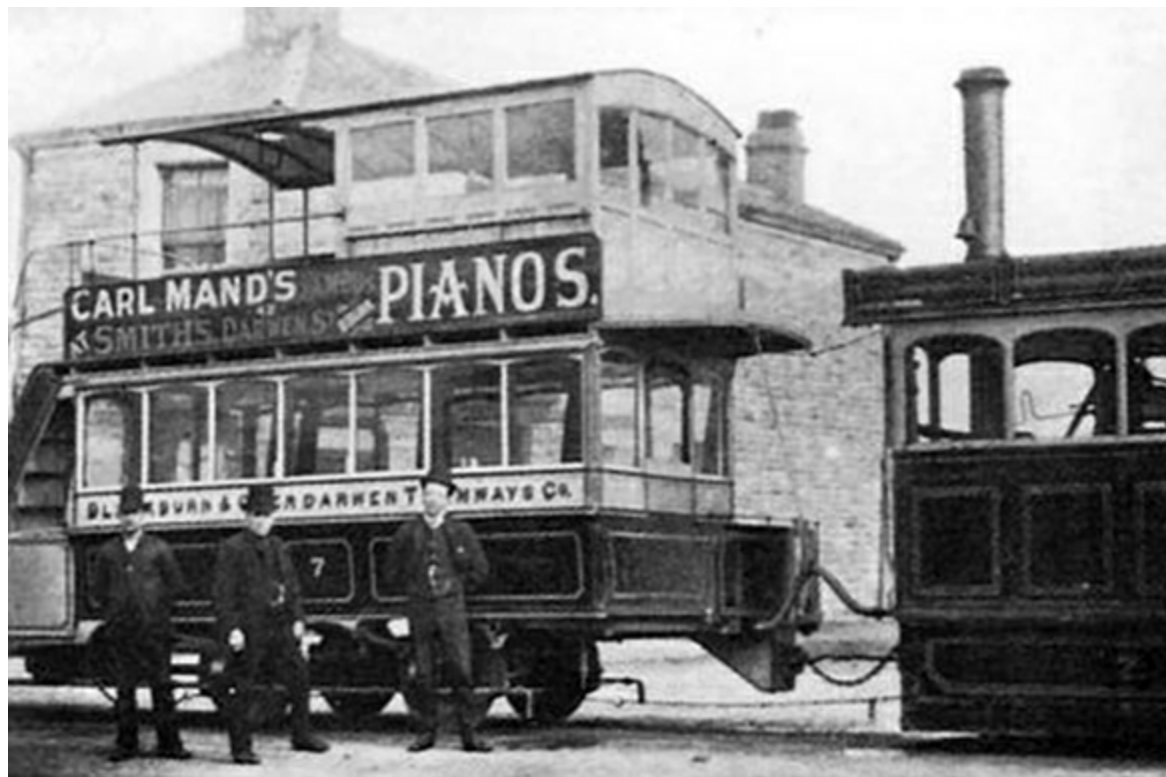
1888; 10-11; Double-deck enclosed bogie; Milnes; 28/28

1889-96; 12-19; Double-deck enclosed bogie; Milnes; 28/28

Nos. 1-8 received short canopy top-covers at a later date.

The four open-top single-deck cars were purchased specifically for the transportation of workmen and were withdrawn after about 12 months (c. 1884). It is not known if they carried fleet numbers, but may have been numbered 9-12.

At the time of the take-over on 1st January 1899 only 13 of these trailers remained in stock. Blackburn took three of the Milnes trailers (fleet numbers unknown) and Darwen took the remainder. It is probable that the withdrawn trailers were from the initial batch of 1881 Ashbury trailers, but no record has survived.



1881 Ashbury trailer car No. 7 showing the short canopy top-cover that was fitted later to prevent soot and steam from the loco falling on passengers. (LTHL collection).

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Additional information, corrections and photographs are always welcome.
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