

CROSSING TRAGEDY

COLLISION AT BORONIA

ELECTRIC TRAIN AND MOTOR WAGGON

NINE PEOPLE KILLED; ELEVEN INJURED

PICNIC PARTY FROM CLIFTON HILL

Appalling loss of life was caused by a collision between an electric train and an enclosed motor waggon, carrying a picnic party, at a level crossing near the Boronia railway station early last evening. The motor truck, which was travelling along the Ringwood road in a northerly direction, was struck by the train, which was running from Fern Tree Gully to the city.

Though the driver of the train had applied the brakes some moments before the collision occurred, the impact was terrific, and the waggon, with its load of men, women and little children, 25 altogether, was smashed and dragged along the railway line by the fore-part of the leading carriage.

The more fortunate of the occupants were thrown clear of the rails, but others were shockingly crushed, and must have been killed almost before they realised that the accident had happened. Nine people were killed, and eleven were injured.

The train concerned in the tragedy was the 5.58 p.m. train from Fern Tree Gully, and it reached the crossing at 6.10 p.m. It was driven by William Edwards, an experienced motorman.

The picnic party comprised friends and relatives from Clifton Hill. It was their custom on Sundays and holidays to hire the Ford van from Mr. Samuel Tant, carrier, of 219 Gertrude-street, Fitzroy, and spend the day in the country. They were happy family parties and were largely attended. On one previous occasion Fern Tree Gully had been made the rendezvous, and yesterday it was decided

tion Fern Tree Gully had been made the rendezvous, and yesterday it was decided to visit that district again. Owing to the threatening weather the party was not as large as usual, but the day was spent happily, and with the approach of dusk preparations were made for the return home. All went well until nearing the railway crossing, which has a bad reputation. One of the male picnickers called out to the driver to go slowly, as some of the women were nervous.

In his short statement to the police before he was hurried to the hospital, Tant said that when he received this request he slowed down to about ten miles an hour. He did not see or hear the train approaching. He was a little more than half way across the single line of rails when the train, which seemed to come from nowhere, struck the motor waggon with terrific force. He remembered no more until he found himself lying on a stretcher in Page's garage. Questioned as to whether the train whistled on approaching the crossing, Tant said the train might have whistled, but he did not hear it.

Probably the first man on the scene of the crash was Mr. N. Jones, the local school teacher. He was in the bake house a few yards away when he heard the whistle of the train, followed by a terrific crash. He rushed out, and at once saw that a terrible tragedy had occurred. The wreckage of the van was lying at the side of the road, just clear of the line, and there seemed to be bodies everywhere. The mutilated body of one little girl was lying beneath the train, which had to be backed before it could be extracted. Near by was the severed arm

which had to be backed before it could be extricated. Near by was the severed arm of a woman. Some of the bodies were hurled over the cattle-pit fence into the adjoining enclosure. Two bodies of young women were lying sixty yards away. There were no screams when he heard the crash, but as the train jerked to a standstill, with some of the coaches still on the crossing, heartrending moans from the injured could be heard.

The train was crowded, and soon a swarm of terrified passengers were on the spot. Fortunately a number of boy scouts were returning by the train, and they with wonderful skill and adaptability organised the relief of the injured. The scouts comprised troops of the 1st North Fitzroy, 1st Fitzroy and 1st Camberwell groups, and they were joined shortly after the accident by the 6th Malvern troop, who were marching from Sasarra. With great presence of mind they hacked sufficient material from the ruined motor wagon to make improvised stretchers. The dead were collected and placed on the waiting train and taken to the City Morgue in charge of Constable Billson, of Fern Tree Gully. The injured were hurried to Mr. Page's garage in Ringwood-road, about 40 yards from the scene of the accident.

Although his wife is in indifferent health, Mr. Page at once placed his house, garage and cars at the service of the victims. He himself set off at once for Fern Tree Gully and brought back Senior-Constable Williamson and Constable Billson.

In the meantime Mr. Schenk, the local postmaster, had telephoned to Ringwood and Belgrave for medical aid, and within half an hour Drs. Langley, Heywood and Albiston, of Ringwood, and Drs. Jorgensen and Francis, of Belgrave, were on the scene. The civil ambulance, which was notified by telephone, rushed several ambulance cars fully equipped to Boronia, and the injured, after receiving first-aid treatment, were taken to the Melbourne, Alfred and Children's Hospitals. In the first-aid work valuable assistance was given by Mr. W. Hollow, chemist, of Brunswick-street, Fitzroy, who was spending the week end at Boronia, and by Nurse Gale, of the Melbourne Hospital, who was a passenger on the train. Splendid work was done by the scouts throughout. Many of them were very young, but amidst the terrible scenes of suffering and death they remained as cool as veterans, and never flinched from any duty however nerve racking. Dr. Heywood was accompanied by his wife, and she, with Nurse Gale, worked untiringly in relieving and soothing the injured women and children.

Boronia is what is called a "woman-in-charge" station. The station mistress, Mrs. F. Ellart, telephoned news of the accident to Fern Tree Gully. Mr. W. Searle, electric running officer, who was at Fern Tree Gully superintending the holiday traffic, with Special Officer Plummer, motored to Boronia, and joined in the rescue work. Later in the night

mer, motored to Boronia, and joined in the rescue work. Later in the night Railway Commissioner Molony and Shannon visited the scene of the fatality.

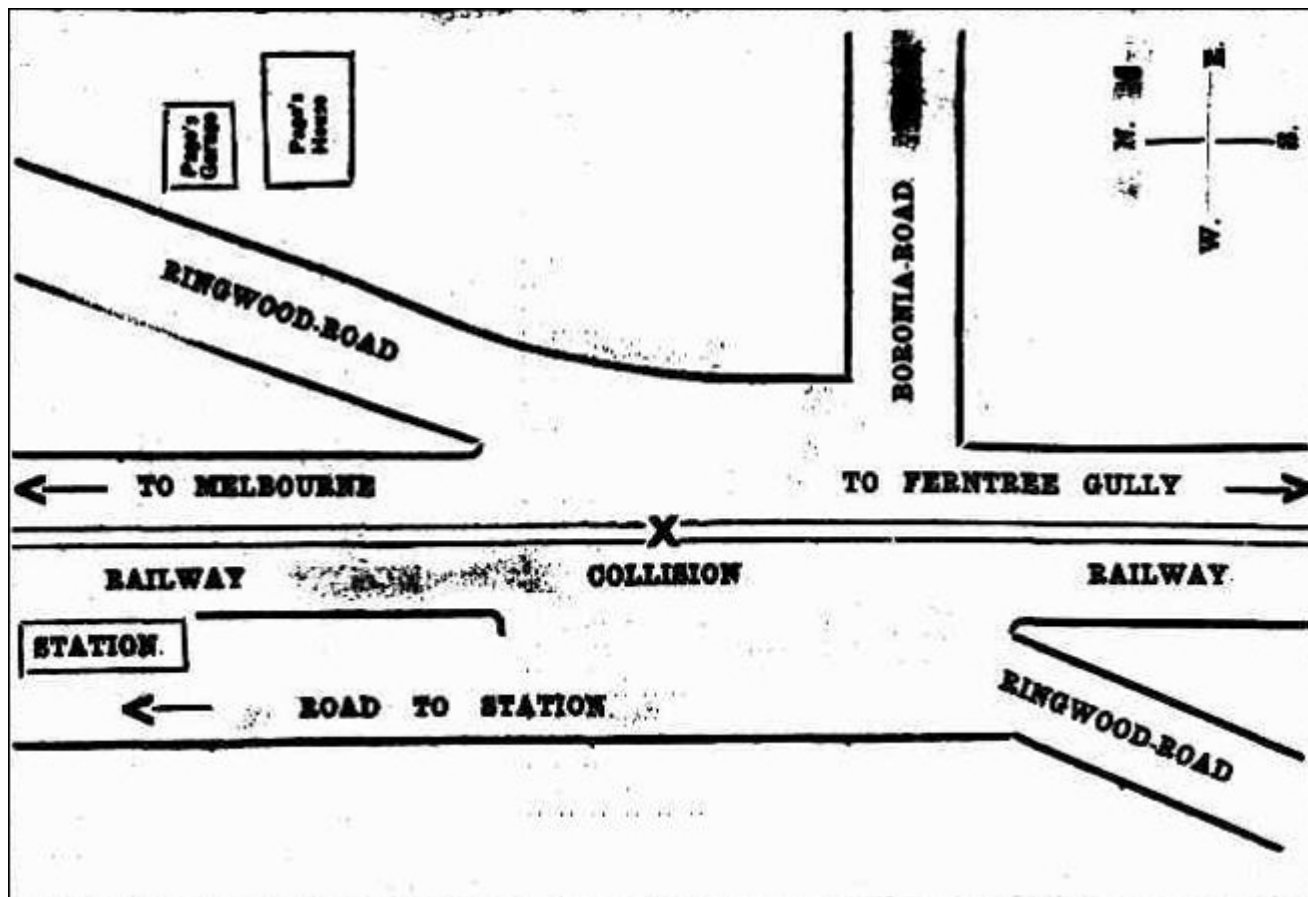
The last of the injured to leave Boronia was Mrs. Eileen Gardiner, of 102 Noone-street, Clifton Hill. She had been accompanied by her father, Mr. J. Walker, who is 80 years of age; her sister, Miss Madge Walker, and her three children, Jack Gardiner (3 years), Ronnie Gardiner (20 months), Jean Gardiner (8 months), and her nephew, Andrew Gardiner (13 years). Mrs. Gardiner sustained head, face and internal injuries.

Though suffering considerable pain, Mrs.

Gardiner was conscious, and was able to give her brief recollections of the moment of tragedy. After explaining that the parties always used Mr. Tant's van for their picnics, she said that they usually numbered about 30, all old friends and relatives. Yesterday, owing to the threatening weather, their numbers were the smallest for months.

Nothing had marred the day's quiet enjoyment. The rain held off, and it was a well-satisfied party that packed up for home at dusk. One of the girls in the back of the van was nervous, and one of the young men called out to the driver to slow down neaping the railway. Mr. Tant did so, and they were going very slowly. No one dreamed of danger, and the first warning was when one of the girls sitting on the east side of the van called out, "Oh, the train!" and screamed. A moment later there was a fearful crash. Mrs. Gardiner felt herself flying through the air, and remembered no more until she regained consciousness on a stretcher in Mr. Page's garage.

A local resident, Mr. Piergrose, mail carrier, of Bayswater, had a terrifying experience at the same crossing twelve months ago. He was run down by a train, and had his car splintered to match-



wood, but was thrown clear, and escaped without a scratch.