

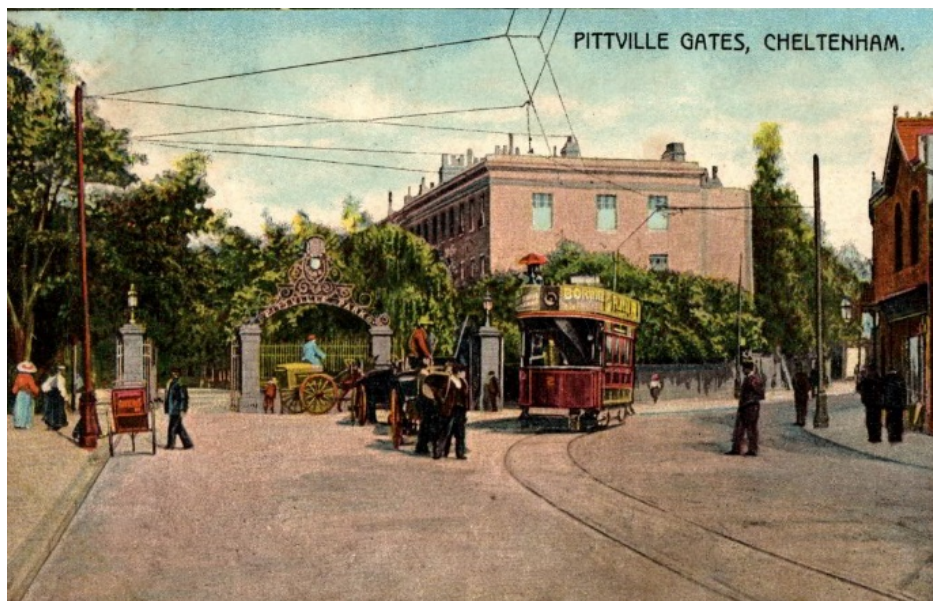
Cheltenham & District Light Railway Tram

Mike Smith April 2025

The Cheltenham tramway system was promoted by Thomas Nevins, an American entrepreneur, who formed the Cheltenham and District Light Railway Company in 1898 and obtained a Light Railway Order two years later.

The first, and longest, route opened on 22nd August 1901. It was built to 3ft 6in gauge and ran for a distance of nearly six miles in a north-easterly direction from the district of Lansdown along Gloucester Road. It then headed to the Midland Railway's Lansdown station, on to the Great Western Railway's Malvern Road station, then to the town centre, serving the Great Western Railway's St James Station, before heading out to Cleeve Hill via Winchcombe Street and Prestbury Road.

Two other routes from the town centre opened on 28th March 1905 to Leckhampton and Charlton Kings, but the original Cleeve Hill route features on the postcard reproduced here.



The postcard was never used, but it can be dated quite easily. Printed on the back are the words "Card issued by John Lance & Co Ltd, DRAPERS, Cheltenham, established 1851". There is a message printed on the back, using a hand stamp, that reads:

*"John Lance & Co Will CLOSE THEIR ESTABLISHMENT ON MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY
DEC. 24th, 25th & 26th".*

The postcard was probably produced before 1920. The only years between the opening of the tramway in 1901 and 1920 on which 24th December fell on a Monday were 1906 and 1917. It could date from 1917, but by then, Cheltenham trams were being painted grey as a wartime austerity measure, so 1906 is the most likely date.

The postcard shows "Pittville Gates, Cheltenham", built in 1833. There was a hackney carriage stand by the gates and a number of hackney carriage drivers can be seen waiting for customers.

The map is a segment of the 1921 25 inch Ordnance Survey map showing the track layout of the tramway at Pittville Gates at the junction of Clarence Road, Winchcombe Street and Prestbury Road.



We learn from the map that the tramway was single track and there was a passing loop around the corner behind where the tram was photographed. The tram featured on the postcard appears to be number 2. The picture on the card has been hand coloured and one never knows how much “enhancement” was carried out by the person who did it, but it certainly could be number 2.

Eight open-top double-deckers were provided by John Stephenson Company of New York for the opening, numbered 1–8. Presumably the tramway’s promoter, Thomas Nevins, preferred to buy trams from his native America rather than from a British manufacturer. The next four trams purchased by the Cheltenham & District Light Railway came from the Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Co, but that’s another story.

The gates were Grade 2 listed in 1972 but were badly in need of restoration. In 2011 the Friends of Pittville launched a project to restore them and improve the surrounding area. The restored gates were formally re-opened on 7 April 2015. The modern photograph was taken on January 30th 2025 and shows the beautifully restored gates. Sadly, the tram from Cleeve Hill no longer stops there and electric scooters for hire have replaced the hackney carriages. Cheltenham’s tramway closed on 31st December 1930, but sections of track were uncovered on Cleeve Hill a few years ago during major road works.

