

**Archer Park Rail Museum: Lynn Zelmer interviewing Blair Jamieson and Bill Head, 5 Sep 2008.**

[Session continued from transcript AP080905a]

LZ: Well, if you want to pick up Blair, what are some of the things you remember about your early working days?

BLAIR: I started working in Brisbane in 1945, in February 1945, and I started in the little machine shop in Roma railway yards and we used to repair all the different bits and pieces of electrical equipment; all the stuff that was associated with Morse code. We did telephones and we manufactured things, and it was a great little workshop for experiences for your hands and hands-on and all sort of machines. We had lathes and shaping machines and we had one little miller and we had all that sort of stuff in the machine shop.

For two years I worked in there; it was very interesting and very good and to this day, I'm still using the knowledge to restore equipment now. In fact every Thursday I do a bit of restoration work and I'm in the process of restoring a sounder at the moment in Morse Code. It's a very old type of sounder; it came from Telecom.

So that was my first couple of years and after you did two years in that machine shop, then you went to what we called the 'Outside Section' where you went to the signal cabins and particularly the one at Mayne Junction and the one at Central.

Central was slightly different and I put in time at Park Road on the south side of Brisbane. We used to look after the automatic signaling between South Brisbane and Indooroopilly. And we also looked after the electric staffing system which ran down as far as Caribee and Kingston.

And then, as I said, I worked in the Mayne Junction signal cabin which had 125 levers, for a few months there. Every morning when we were working on the automatic signalling for the protection of trains in the suburban area, in the morning we would walk from Mayne Junction to Northgate and catch the train back and we would check voltages on the track; the track voltage would be somewhere around 350 to 400 millivolts. We would check those voltages to see they weren't high and for safety reasons we had to have a look at them, but of course, they don't use that sort of signalling now. They use a signal now instead of a voltage.

So that's what they use now and I also worked.... We did certain time in other sections. We did time on the electric pumps. In the steam days they had to have pumps to supply water for the trains and that was supplied at Caboolture on the north side, Palmwoods, Yandina -- They had electric pumps; we used to go there on a day trip to each individual place. To Helidon, Toogoolawah, Esk, and Beenleigh. We had a pump there. We used to go to all those places on day trips.

And that was the job we always used to like to get around September or October when you could get a bit of time sitting in the train doing a bit of study to catch up on, because we had final exams coming up. Not like now, they have an exam at the end of every term and that's the end of it.

In my day we had to have a final exam at the end of the year on the whole year. When you finished your five years you had an exam on the five years.

I would dare to suggest that it's much easier now.

I've worked around exchanges, telephone exchanges, and a little automatic exchange at Mayne Junction which another fellow and I virtually rebuilt. It was a twenty-line one which was just

used around Mayne Junction. And it was a right little thing; gave a fair bit of trouble, but it was in the early days, it was the technology.

We went on wiring stations. I remember once we put some power points in at a place and the electrician I was working with, he wasn't long out of his time and we had to wire these power points in conduit and it took us four or five days to put in three or four power points. Now with the new type of cable and power points you'd put in half a dozen power points in half a day because we don't have to clip the wires. You just lie them around and it's altogether different.

So that sums up quite a bit of the work I did in the early days. I looked after the Gympie signal cabin for years. That was a great job because that was my home town and I was 'king of the castle there'. I was the only electrician in Gympie and you can well imagine how I would have fixed many, many toasters and many irons and all sorts of gadgets. All the loco crew. The signal cabin in Gympie was the real meeting point and later on becoming involved in politics, it was a real meeting point, the Gympie signal cabin and electricians and fitters from other places always called in to see 'Jemmo' in Gympie, have a cup of tea there at the cabin.

So that's about what happened in my early days. I came to Rockhampton in 1950, went back to Nambour. From Nambour I played in the big league, Rugby League in Brisbane; and then I went from Gympie to Cairns, Cairns to Maryborough and from Maryborough back to Rockhampton and I've been here ever since, but I'm still always going home to Gympie -- I'm going home next week.

LZ: What was the purpose of the signalling tower? You've talked about towers and so on, why 'towers'? [sic, asking about a discussion prior to the taping]]

BLAIR: Did I say 'towers'? Signal 'cabins' it was always called a cabin. That one down there, that was called a cabin [Pointing to the signal cabin in the Archer Park Station]. Always the terminology in the railway was 'up in the signal cabin'.

One of the other things we did when we were kids 1948-49 and 50, when I was in my third, fourth and fifth year, we were very short of tradesmen; it was the transition period from the end of the war and in my fifth year I was paid as a tradesman. And the other four boys -- there were three boys that were with me -- they were all paid as tradesmen in our fifth year because we were doing the work of a tradesman. And one of the things we used to do because some of the electricians that were still there were quite old fellows, quite old men then.

We had to replace the lights, the bulbs in the floodlight towers in the Roma Street railway yards and they were 110 feet high and, of course, the old boss he had to rely on all us young kids to climb the towers to replace the bulbs and we'd get up there and we'd be looking down the Brisbane River from the big one over the signal cabin at Roma Street. We'd get up there and we could see everywhere. It was a great view. We'd get up there; he'd be down the bottom yelling at us, "Come down, come down."

We'd pretend we didn't hear him or didn't know he was there and we'd be having a great old look around, change the bulbs, clean the reflectors and eventually come down, but now I think about it, I wouldn't go up a ladder two feet; but I used to climb these 110 foot towers with no trouble at all.

Of course, the boss had to rely on all of us young kids -- lads -- kids -- we were 20 years old, 19 year old so we'd no fear. A couple of the boys would never climb them, but I climbed them many times and I had five of them in the yard at Gympie that were 80 feet high that I used to have to climb to change the bulbs but that never worried me. That was one of the interesting little stories to tell about the early days and the electrical power side of work.

ENDS