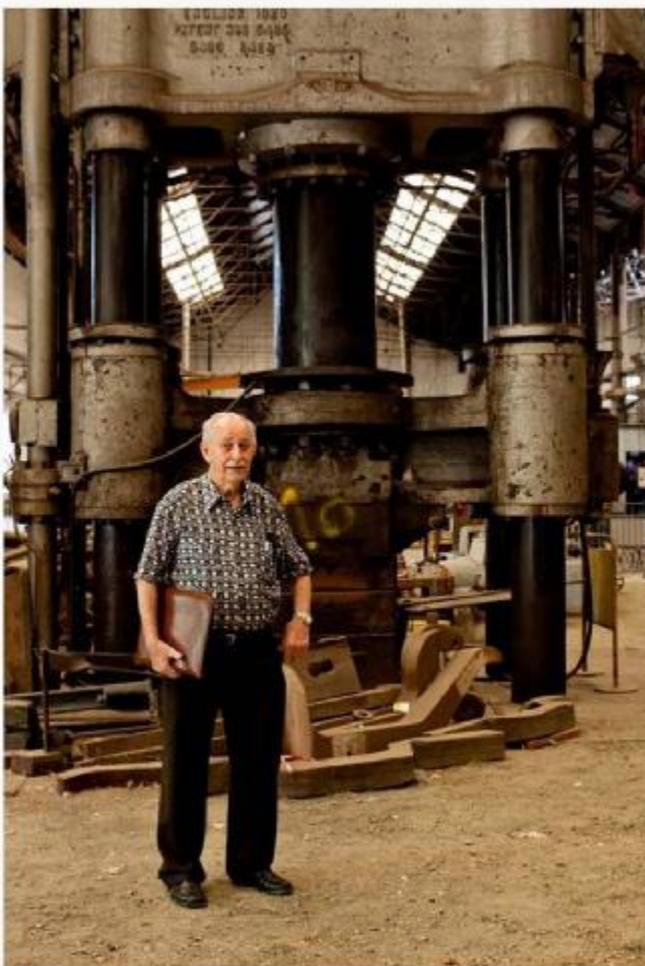


Richard Butler DOB: April 16, 1936



Richard Butler

"It was hard going: the work there was very hot. In that section near the Davy Press, when the ingot of steel came out, the core was glowing red and white heat. In that era you were soaks if you wore any protective clothing, so your clothing would be actually on fire. It'd be smouldering while you were doing the work and there'd be hot pieces of steel laying around your feet.

....now if you went to the other hammer, which is called a double arch hammer, that was all fire and brimstone because every time the hammer hit, the sparks would fly from one end of the shop to the other end of the shop. If you got hit by it you couldn't stop work. There may be twelve pieces of steel in the furnace and you had to keep working and it wasn't until it was all over that you kind of came back to earth.

You'd look down your arms and you'd see blood running down because the heat of the steel when it hit you. It'd be another 2 or 3 hours before the next lot of steel got hot, you waited for it to come out and then you'd start working again."

R: My name's Richard Butler and I started as a country apprentice in a little depot called Casino and that was in 1950. You had to do workshop experience, I was transferred to Sydney, which I started in Blacksmith shops No. 1 and 2, which were the oldest there, 1884, heritage value too down there, and from there I did a lot of hard study. I was elevated to positions of welding engineer for the New South Wales Government Railways at the Wilson Street testing laboratories, which was just on the other side, the carriage works side. This was the locomotive side.

M: You obviously know a lot about Eveleigh

R: Yes I know everything from the foundations up, which most people don't.

M: How do you know so much?

R: Well, I've just had a great involvement. When I went to school I wasn't that bright at school, but when I joined the railways, the Railways Institute nurtured and fostered me and in no time I was holding a senior engineer's position in the railways department there. Dad started here in 1925 really, so it was kind of imparted in the family, following family tradition. But then my grandparents, Pop as we used to call him, Pop Radley, he worked in the green house at Wynyard. After I left the railways and went to TAFE I discovered that the chief engineer, a famous man name of Edward Lucy, that my grandparents were related, parents were actually Lucys and I was never told that. Little boys should be seen and not heard.

M: Did your father talk much about his work here?

R: Not really, he talked more about the depot at Enfield, not at Eveleigh. No he wasn't much about Eveleigh.

M: As a child do you remember him getting up in the morning and going to work?

R: Oh yes, well that was during the War, because when the War started we were transferred to Casino because he was an essential service and of course, as a young child we used to go to the locomotive depot because you wouldn't see your parents, he'd be away 7 days a week, and I was very privileged at 10 or 12 years of age, driving the steam locomotives around there, which, in the books I've written I can't say anything about that, you know.

M: You were not allowed to because it was illegal?

R: Oh no, not illegal. Same as taking photographs, you weren't allowed to take photographs, that was a no no. But thank god a person did take photographs and it was Eveleigh, it was Casino, and this is very important there, because I know my depot at Casino, we've got the coal stage and the depot on the National Register, it's got to be preserved forever. And I fought for this place too, at Eveleigh in the same way, since 1991.

M: What happened in 1991?

R: I wrote a 56 page report for Federal and State governments about why Eveleigh, one of the world's greatest railway workshops, and why I say that, I was a member of the Smithsonian Institute, and the Smithsonian Institute quoted where Eveleigh was the finest Victorian Era Steam Railway workshop left in the world, and I've pursued that ever since.

M: Passionately?

R: Absolutely yep.

M: The smell of the Davey press room.. The way it can take you back to the past, where you worked..

R: It was hard going. The work there was very hot. When they ingot the steel, which was 5 ton, there was a big crane in that section near the Davy Press, when the ingot of steel came out the core was glowing red and white heat and in that era you were soaks if you wore any protective clothing, so your clothing would be actually on fire. It'd be smouldering while you were doing the work and there'd be hot pieces of steel laying around your feet. You had to wear safety shoes, you may walk on a hot piece of steel. Even the weight of the tools. to pick a tool up and put it underneath a press, it was only a squeeze action, a slow action, not like a drop hammer, which is much faster to, but it was hard toil and hard work. There was a gang of 5 people and a man driving the overhead crane, Ted Bocock for many years there. Tough going. Now if you went to the other hammer, which is called a double arch hammer, that was all fire and brimstone because every time the hammer hit, the sparks would fly from one end of the shop to the other end of the shop. If you got hit by it you couldn't stop work, and there may be 12 pieces of steel in the furnace and you had to keep working, but after you finished you'd look down your arms and you'd see blood running down off your arms because the heat of the steel when it would hit you and they had all of the blocks to release the job from the blocks, it would fly and hit you and you had to keep working and it wasn't until it was all over that you kind of came back to earth and you waited until the next heat, it'd be another 2 or 3 hours before the next lot of steel got hot, to come out and start working again, very fascinating. The other thing too, was that people that worked there, a lot of them were from overseas countries, new Australians there, but they were wonderful people. They had new haircuts and we had ways to cook new meals, we learnt a lot from those people and a lot of them became wonderful Australians, a credit to our country.

M: A lot of Italians?

R: Not so many Italians, no, no, Czechoslovakians and Malta. Germans, I had a chap who was standing in Shop No. 2, not far away from here, one day, I looked at him, if he had a Nazi uniform on, but I was a blacksmith and said, you stand that side of the anvil and I'll stand this side and that was it, but he never smiled, but that was fun really, that was fun. I had another bloke, Jack Fele, Jack was in No. 2 workshop there, he was a blacksmith striker and I used to have 2 of those for the work I used to do. Jack was always worried about the Bolsheviks and the Mansheviks, and I didn't have a clue what he was all about, ha ha ...!

M: Would you mind telling us about the books you have written?

R: Okay well the first book I wrote and produced and published was Steam Days on the North Coast of New South Wales. It's all about railways but it does include aircraft because the aircraft industry was very young,

plus the shipping industry on the North Coast, on the Richmond and Clarence Rivers. Then I got involved with the great photographer David Moore, and a lady called Caroline Simpson, who produced a book to help save Eveleigh. What we could do because she was a philanthropist and Caroline kindly had an exhibition with David at the Sydney Art Gallery, with Edmund Capon and company, and I went and looked at the photographs there, which were beautiful photographs, he was a real expert in what he was doing, and I said, all of your captions that you're writing is totally wrong. There are a lot of people out there who follow railways around the world and they would pick that to pieces, so Lady Caroline rang me up one Sunday and I was out on my garage roof painting my roof and she said, would you be good enough to edit my book? I said yeah, okay, that'll be good, I'll do that. So I went ahead and done that, but then I'd lay in bed at night saying magnificent photography but this isn't the story of Eveleigh. So 7 years later at great expense to me, I produced a book, Richard Butler's Reminiscences of the Great Eveleigh Railway Workshops, and it came out in 2004 and it's still selling extremely well. Only yesterday a driver rang me from Flemington saying, can I get that book?

M: Thanks so much Richard.

R: As I said it's a long story, a very interesting story. I've been fighting for this place, it's cost me a fortune. I'm on a pension these days. I went down and bought electrodes for the job last week, \$147. Well inside the firebox you've got C36 type boilers out here, this is a 59 type class locomotive, American born, it came into the country in 1952. It's never had new boilers in them so you are trying to keep the machines running. To buy a new one would be over \$2 million worth, so a crowd called Lachlan Valley Railways have come to me and said, with my welding experience here and in TAFE and as a senior educationist in the Education Department with TAFE, that's not the first job but I've helped many organisations out over, in 2000 the Powerhouse Museum came to me and said, we're restoring a locomotive, 3265, beautiful painted maroon colour, and they said no one knows how to metal cross heads so things will go really fast. There's something behind us UNCLEAR pump room, but also all the bearings of the locomotive, so over 4 years I did all that type of work there. Then the Parramatta people had some old steam trams and cable trams that used to run around the streets of Sydney in the 1860's and I've done major work for them, because the skills aren't taught. We don't teach what we used to teach, it's called progress. END



Richard Butler



Davy Press, Blacksmiths Workshop