



Ian Mair

Ian Mair – The Foreign Orders
Oh, I couldn't tell the story about the SP bookmaker..... The less said about him the better. He was at the carriage works. Bill my sub foreman said 'Lucky (my nickname), how thirsty are you?' He liked a drink and he wanted company. We'd go to the Royal Hotel down Wilson St. Sometimes we'd stay so long I'd just get back in time to do the newspaper run and the buckets. 2-3 hours at the pub! Billy's

Look everything was OK if it was wrapped in newspapers. You've got to understand, the Foreign Orders were not for the railways. If you said Ian, I need a set of blades for me lawnmower, these were the Foreign Orders. The Spring Shop used to be the place. There was a guy who had a tiny dog. Well, we built him a kennel. It was huge! Took 6 guys to lift it. Couldn't wrap that in newspaper. But you could get your floor pans for your cars, I even made clutch rods for Leyland 700 buses. A friend of mine had a bus company. Next thing we've got a dozen clutch rods. I've still got 11 at home. That first one was so well made, it lasted forever!

My name is Ian Mair, I'm a former Eveleigh locomotive railway workshop employee. I was first employed here on the 23rd of the 3rd Month, 1976 as a shop boy in the Millwright section. The shop boys job was like a junior labourer and his job was to go around to get the morning tea orders, lunch orders, to clean the washing up buckets, to go and get the newspapers and just general duties, office duties. Running errands for the boss and things like that. I then progressed to the position of Junior Labourer, then I was a brickie's labourer, then I was a fitter's assistant, all in the Millwright's section, and then I became the youngest acting overhead crane driver in the Eveleigh Locomotive Workshops. I also drove the cranes in the foundry and I also drove the cranes in the Large Erecting Shop, lifting locomotives off their bogies and putting them onto stands. Sadly, I wasn't there for the same era and the skills that I acquired, not only here, but also at Chullora Bus Workshops, I employed those skills when I was working for the private bus industry. And also, I still employ those skills when I was, when I worked as a volunteer for the Sydney Bus and Truck Museum. I'm basically what you'd call an understudy of a tradesman.

M: You were telling before about a boxing ring..

I: Yes, the boxing ring. I've got to be careful here, is it all right if I name someone? Okay, my sub foreman's name was Jimmy Jefferies and Jimmy was a wonderful man, but he didn't take kindly to fools. I'm being careful in what I'm saying here and, Jimmy was also an amateur boxer and he was damned good at what he did, and anyway, for any of the shop boys or any of the apprentices who got too cheeky, he'd say well come on son, we'll put a set of gloves on and we'll go up the Large Erecting Shop and sort this out and I'll tell you what when Jimmy had been through them they didn't give any more cheek, yes.

M: Did management ever interfere with the way people dealt with each other and those things?

I: No, no it was the done thing in those days, it was a pretty strict regime, you know like you had to lift your docket at a certain time, you put your docket back on at a certain time. If you got caught being away from the work location, you'd get a bung, as was already discussed, if you got a bung you could lose 15 minutes of pay. If it was really bad you could be even sent home and you'd lose whatever time. Say like you got done, you could lose anything up to half a day's pay. In fact it was so strict at one stage, especially when I first started here, you used to have to ask the foreman if they'd give you permission to go and use the toilet, yes. And the washing up buckets, I used to wash 20 buckets by 3, which is 60 buckets per day for our trades and non trades staff because washing facilities and showering facilities were pretty limited here, and the management believed in getting the maximum production out of the staff.

M: I read some things about people hiding their buckets so you could wash up early?

I: You were gone. If the foreman or the Works Manager caught you being off your job or washing up early, you'd be bunged. You'd have a real, please explain, yes.

M: We were going to also talk about the overhead cranes.

I: The overhead cranes? When I'd just turned 18, which was 1978, there was a position that became vacant for a crane driver and I thought yeah, beauty this might give me some sort of qualification in life and anyway, I became the youngest acting overhead crane driver. I drove all the overhead cranes in the main workshops, the Large Erecting Shop and also the foundry. My favourite crane, which sadly no longer is here anymore was L33, down at the foundry and I used to be on the metal pour there and what used to happen there was all the core boxes would be from, made up thanks to the pattern shops supplying the patterns. Everything that was made in Eveleigh for anything to do with the railways, all had an Eveleigh pattern behind them and anything that was cast here at Eveleigh always had the part number that started with E, which stood for Eveleigh, and at 2 o'clock in the afternoons, at the foundry, I would be called upon, and L33 would be called upon to lift the big ladle up to the furnace and then the big furnace lid would open. Then the big molten cast iron would be poured, it was like, just liquid, like a boiling hot tea, yeah, just all melted down and it'd go into a ladle and then what I'd have to do was then lift the ladle up, cross travel, long travel, head north down the foundry to where the moulders were and we'd then pour this big ladle into a series of little ladles, being very, very careful not to vary the temperature of the molten cast iron, otherwise it'd flash up everywhere. It'd spark and people would get burnt and everything. Like as has already been said today, the working environment here at Eveleigh, in those days, it



was very hot, in the summer, it was very hot in the summer. In the winter time it was freezing cold. We didn't have such luxuries as air conditioning or fans or anything like that. We had a number of wooden fires in the place to try and keep the place warm. Later in the piece we had diesel fired like stoves to try and keep the place warm and that was where we made the little racks to go on the side of the chimneys of them and we used to cook our toast on it, yeah. And, of course to get these diesel fired stove things going, until the diesel actually caught alight the workshop would be covered in smoke, in diesel smoke, yes. But yeah, down the foundry, poor old L33, which is now no longer with us, we used to be on the metal pour and on the afternoon shift at Eveleigh Foundry there'd be 500 casts, cast iron brake shoes cast, and what would happen is it'd go through the UNCLEAR machine, go through what they call a shake out, which would shake the sand and the plumbago moulding back into one hopper and the red hot cast brake shoes would be all rattled along into a skip, and there'd be 500 brake shoes made in an afternoon. Then what would happen is whatever we'd cast during that day would be allowed to cool and we had a dressing shop and the parts would go to the dressing shop and there'd be a dresser there, which had a big grinding wheel and he would dress the dags off the castings and then of course, whatever had been dressed, if it required machining it would go to 10 Bay to the machine shop. We used to have our own Oliver Shop here, our own coppersmiths. We used to have a wheel section where we used to have a sweat, would you believe train wheels do have tyres? We used to sweat the tyres off the rim, off the wheel, and then of course we used to heat the new band up and then we'd shrink the train wheel, the train tyre back onto the train wheel.

In fact, in the 1940's Alexandria, like this is the area of Alexandria, Alexandria was known as the Birmingham of Australia. Like Birmingham in London, in the 1940's was huge industrial and this is what Alexandria was and sadly, I think I've already made mention of the Boundary Hotel. Now I'd like to do this because the Boundary Hotel, I'm an alcoholic, I've been an alcoholic since I was 15 years of age but, the Boundary Hotel, I used to drink in there with men, and I do say men, that were a lot older than me, that were old enough to be my own father. In fact I had my 18th birthday party in the Boundary Hotel, and the lovely late and great Jimmy and Jean McLaren who were the publicans at the time, she said to me, Ian, well Lucky as they sometimes called me because that was my nickname in the Millwright Section, you are 18 today. I said yes, Jean, she said well prove it and so I pulled out my driver's licence and oh yeah, okay son, because we all used to drink out in the hen's pen, which was the Ladies' Parlour, and I can remember seeing elderly women up there sitting there with a bag, and they'd be having a beer and a cigarette, peeling the potatoes, peeling the carrots, getting ready to cook this evening's dinner. And sadly, only about 2 weeks ago, the Boundary Hotel closed its doors.

Yes, yes the Boundary Hotel had many, many a railway send off as I already said earlier on today, I've seen the Boundary Hotel at lunch time, 4 deep with uniforms and overcalled men. I've seen men come in there after working in the foundry, after working in the blacksmiths and drink 10 schooners in half an hour, yes. In my short period of living and working around here, for only 34 years, I have witnessed and I can name the pubs, 14 hotels that have closed because sadly, this area, this area, because they've taken the manufacturing away. They've taken the railway workshops away, they've taken, this is by the way successive governments, both Labor and Liberal, have done this. They have basically deskilled the workforce. They have turned this area into, they're saying oh we're trying to gentrify it and we're trying to yuppify it, no, they've killed this area, because there's no more industry. The amount of industries that are out there suffering today because sadly, Redfern, Waterloo, Alexandria is made up of 3 kinds of people. One, the people have got expensive mortgages, they can't afford anything. Two, people that are paying very, very expensive rent, they've got no money. And poor people like myself who live on a Disability Support Pension, live in Department of Housing high rise accommodation, and they've got no money. This area sadly, because of the raping and the pillaging that has gone on by successive governments is cash starved. People are living in poverty because of it. I wish that Eveleigh could reopen again as a fully functional workshops so we could start up apprenticeships, so we could give the young people today, that deserve a fair go. Instead of throwing them on the dole and going oh, you're a dole bludger, give them a job. Give them a trade, give them an apprenticeship, give them some kind of skill, because we were once the lucky country. We're not no more, because who was the man that once quoted it, Australia has become the arsehole of the world. I think it was the great Paul Keating wasn't it? Right, and that's what we've become, that's what we've become and I do work within the Redfern area with the Aboriginal people. I have a young Aboriginal friend who is something like 17 years younger than me, when he and I met 14 years ago, that young man couldn't read or write. With my limited education, I don't have any high school education or School Certificate, I was able to give that young man, Aboriginal man, reading and writing. I taught him and I used what they called the old Rote System, which is, you read something, you memorise and then you get the student to read it back to you and I've got him reading and writing to the point now where that has given that young man the confidence to be able to go to

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