

Archer Park Rail Museum: Lynn Zelmer interviewing Blair Jamieson, 8 Oct 2008.

LZ: Wednesday 8 October 2008, Lynn Zelmer with Blair Jamieson (continued from file/transcript ap081008a)

LZ: So, control table, you were saying there's a control table.

BLAIR: Yes. Control rooms years ago were up above the old Parcels Office and the cloak room, and they eventually they shifted them over to the administration building diagonally opposite on the corner of Dennison and Stanley Street. And they rebuilt them and they rebuilt the three tables. They put in three tables -- north, south and the west. Now the south table sat across the corner of the building. The south control room and the south table was a brand new table. It was the first control table that had been built in Queensland Railways in 20 years and there were three of us built it. There was a chap in charge of it by the name of Trevor Eckersley, another apprentice that was 12 months ahead of me, was Jack Pitkeathly and there was myself, and we worked on that and I worked mainly on the table, oh for four months wiring it.

And we fitted it. It was a beautifully finished silky oak table and had all these ringing keys -- a key to ring every separate station and the fellow Pitkeathly, he built the amplifiers, the receiving amplifier and the transmitting amplifier, and it was a real work of art and it looked -- when it was finished it looked really nice, and we hooked it up to the line, at Roma Street in old Kenta Street was where it was built and the chief engineer came down to have a look at it and of course, we were all lauded with praise because of the job we had done with it and then they came up to Rockhampton to put it in and Trevor Eckersley came and Jack Pitkeathly came and poor old Blair Jamieson got left out of the party and he didn't come to Rockhampton to install it and actually I think he probably did more work toward building it than the other two.

But that's how things went. And that table was here for years and years. When I was transferred to Rockhampton later on, a couple of years later, I came up and the old foreman who was here -- his name was Fred Burnett -- he was a real good boss. I always used to say that a boss was as tough as you make him. He was good to me. He took me over -- I was here two days -- he took me over to show me the south control table and he said, "Now look at that, fella. You've got to look after that and keep it good. Look at this, and look at this." I looked at it and I said, "Well Fred, self praise is no recommendation, I built it." "Well, well," he said, "you know all about it; I don't have to tell you anything." So that was the story of the south control table. It was one of the first ones built in years and year in Queensland railways

LZ: Do you want to describe it; you said it's silky oak and it's obviously got some electrical things, but describe it physically; what did it look like? What did it do?

BLAIR: It was about....it would be over six feet long and the tabletop of it wasn't flat; it sloped downwards so that the controller would put his graphs to plot the trains on it. He sat at the table and in front of him, right in front of him, was the speaker where all the control phones from outside on that line, the southern one from here to Bundaberg or Avoondale, they would all be connected all the time and the driver or station master would just pick up his phone and would say, "Rosedale" and the control would answer him.

He'd put his foot on the switch called the 'foot-switch', which operated what was called the 'foot-switch relay'. And the foot-switch relay disconnected the incoming amplifier and connected up the transmitting amplifier to send his voice out to the station, and he'd operate his foot on that every time he spoke and would take it off to listen.

Either side in front of him were big panels. They had keys, and you'd wind these keys and they'd send out 17 impulses that operated a selector at each station and those impulses would only pick up a selector at one station; all the other selectors would just tick away. But wouldn't

connect. And the station which the controller wished to ring, he would operate the selector to ring the bell in the box if he required the station-master. So all these keys were there and he also had keys -- they were switching keys, where he had a phone and could switch on to any line, any of what we used to call 'the omnibus lines'; he could switch over onto the line that all the stations connected to it, that was the omnibus line between Rockhampton and Gladstone; and we didn't have any automatic phones in those days; we had an exchange operated by an operator, a girl here in Rockhampton.

I think there was one girl operated the switchboard in Rockhampton. So that was the South Control Table, a magnificent piece of work, and it finished up, when they eventually took it out and we put in new tables and rebuilt the control rooms, I think the surveyor had it in his office, for a table. I sort of looked at it and thought, "Oh, I'd love to get my hands on that," but anyhow, it was too big to do anything with it, so the surveyor had it; he had it for years; whatever happened to it, it might be at his place now.

LZ: You mentioned just peripherally, drivers speaking as well -- did drivers at that time have phone systems as well?

BLAIR: No, no. The only time a driver would speak might be from an unattended station, but not very often. It was pretty well always the station master. There were station masters or night officers at every station. Now, there's not at any of the stations -- so they would speak. Now, of course, the drivers have access to speak direct to the control from the locomotive, by radio so its gone ahead now -- really modern.

ENDS