

## A Reply to Robert Domm on North Eveleigh

Brian Dunnett

### *Editorial Note*

Below are some comments from Brian Dunnett on a letter that is currently on the Redwatch site from Robert Domm in reply to an article that has been written in response to the *Sydney Morning Herald's* 'Battle Stations for North Eveleigh' on 2nd August, 2008, and Brian Dunnett's letter 'Ditching Eveleigh agreement robs the future by discounting the past' that was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the 4th August. Originally published on the *Australian Railway Songs* blog,<sup>1</sup> a venture jointly run by Dunnett and myself, at this time it seems pertinent to include here—while the mindset of Dunnett, regarding railway heritage issues, is considered in this edition of *Australian Folklore*.

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I do not have to buy in to the differences that Mr Domm (2 August 2008) has with the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the article's accuracy of all points but something should be said about the thrust of Herald's article that Mr Domm chooses to ignore. That point is that it is now obvious that there is a serious bidder for the North Eveleigh site other than the developers who most likely favour the current concept plan of the RWA that he has played a major part in steering through to the concept stage of the planning procedure.

For those who want to see the full story of how the heritage of the site will fare I suggest they have a close look the RWA's Built Environment Plan that was produced shortly after the establishment of the RWA in August 2006 that has details of 12 heritage locations of the whole Redfern railway precinct (not necessary the total of what the National Trust's order

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<sup>1</sup> <<https://railwaysongs.blogspot.co.nz/2017/03/brian-dunnett-replies-to-robert-domm-on.html>>

covers) and the 'concept plan' as it was presented to the public over in May and June 2008 and is now in the hands of the Department of Planning.

Two articles that help follow the process that the RWA has used to downgrade the heritage of the site overall can be followed in the two article that are attached.

Mr Domm's reference to my letter (*SMH*, 4th August) I feel ignores the general circumstances of the Government's response to the heritage of the site since the closing of the workshop in the mid 1980s that I referred to.

Plans for a technology park, as most who have followed the long running story will know, always encompassed the idea that such a park would have an economic component that allow it to function as an economically viable site that main aim was to produce quality technical research that could be sold commercially in the Australian or overseas industrial market.

This aim to produce high quality research rested on number of industrial skill held in the 100 year old experience of Eveleigh as a prime component to demonstrate that NSW had a highly respected industrial base. It was originally recognised that the traditional skills of the workshop could be drawn on to help provide an untold amount technical capital that had been built up on the site with the aid of a workforce that had forged the path of Australia's industrial development since the 1850s.

This economic capital of the Eveleigh workshops as a whole (including the Blacksmith shop) was squandered from the beginning. State Rail, as the Government's agent, was keen to close the whole of the workshop on the basis of it being redundant and an economical drain on the state's budget. They, it can be said, overlooked the true economic and industrial value of the site and it is demonstrated by Mr Domm's effort to turn this issue into a dispute about rent.

According to Mr Domm one blacksmith and a few apprentices have been able to turn a small section of the industrial plant into a \$1.2 million year decorative metal arts business. Even if Mr Domm's figures were right (we don't know if they are) and the blacksmith has been sitting on a peppercorn rent agreement it raises the question of how this matter has occurred. Peppercorn rents for important purposes are not uncommon and the blacksmith concerned has been operating through several Labor Party and Liberal Governments including that of Bob Carr (who launched an open day an open day in my presence on the site a few years ago. To some this may now be just history that all of these administrations never collect the rent. I cannot believe that occurred without some agreement with the land lord. So let's blame the last office boy for forgetting to tell his boss.

I therefore ask how we as a society should measure the value of this blacksmith work in current economic terms.

Our merry blacksmith it appears should be looked at in broader terms to start with as he is also acting by agreement as a guard to machinery (that he does not use) and is possibly worth hundreds of million dollars on the open market to those who would like to sell it.

What is needed is full details of what Mr Domm may consider as a fair rent deal not just for our merry blacksmith but for the other heritage areas particularly the large Erecting Shed one the long term home of 3801 and the paint shop or has he forgotten both these areas are to have multi store height extensions if his concept and built environment plans proceed.

He or someone in the know should make public all deals relating to the site that have been made over the last 20 years or so that we might see who is pulling their economic weight on this still public site. As an example I would like to see exactly what happened to the \$300,000 heritage grant in 1997 to be matched one for one by the technology park that was for conservation, restoration and interpretation of the blacksmith shop equipment and to teach heritage skills.

In conclusion Mr Domm fails to answer the main point I raised in defence of the blacksmith (and 3801 Limited) standing his ground, that is there was an agreement to protect the industrial heritage of this site reached between the 'former workforce and the government' and economic terms for the operation of Eveleigh as a modern day heritage and technical research site should take this in to account.

All those who are interested in the truth of this matter should take the opportunity to look at what they can of the whole former workshop site before the jump to conclusions. This issue will not go away in a hurry— it is a heritage issue.

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