

# Preface

We humans seem to need to know the story of our origins, from both a personal and historical perspective. Our histories tell us who we are and how we got to where we are now. We love to celebrate achievement and to peer into other people's lives. I hope this book involves the reader in a slice of Queensland history that they will become familiar with and be proud to share.

I was 17 years old and in my first few weeks at the University of Queensland, when I was confronted by a group of men with placards about workers' rights. This would not have been unusual at the time, 1971, but what was unusual for me was that the placards bearing negative slogans contained the words "Evans Deakin". A "friend" of mine approached these men and told them I was "AJ" Deakin's granddaughter and they should tell me what their issue was about. I listened quietly for a while but could not relate their story with the history I had come to know through my family. I felt these men were judging me about what they saw as my privileged life, and I was embarrassed about a view I had not known before, about my grandfather and his supposed exploitation of his workers. I was a "radical" person at the time, involved with anti-Vietnam war protests, anti-Springbok

## Man of Steel

The Great Depression years, 1929 to 1935, brought a slowdown of the operations as government loan restrictions and municipal authorities curtailed investment in plant and equipment and private development was limited. The Rocklea works which had invested huge sums in plant did continue to operate at some profit. The development of the rail siding in from the main Brisbane line and the vastness of the site at Rocklea enabled cost effective assembly and movement of steel. On September 26, 1930 *The Courier Mail*, reported that Arthur Deakin believed company business for the following year was “very encouraging”.

The 1934 Annual Company Report forecast continued improvement in the Australian economy and some small profits for the company. The primary business of the company in these years was steel fabrication for bridges, railways and ships. Despite the economic slowdown caused by the Depression, the prudent management of the business enabled jobs to be maintained and some profits to be distributed to shareholders.



*McWhirters Building, Fortitude Valley, 1930.  
Courtesy: State Library, Brisbane*

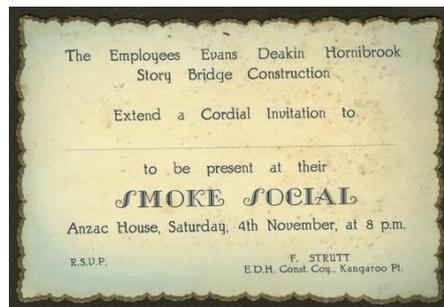
## AJ Deakin and the Story of Evans Deakins Industries

in this bridge construction were tragic and workplace safety appears inconceivable with hindsight.<sup>9</sup>

The Story Bridge was the coming of age project for Evans Deakin. This was big, this was important, this was public and it would require the exquisite tailoring of the skills of the two partners – engineering brilliance and financial wizardry. The ever increasing skills and talents of the workers in Evans Deakin were on display for the whole country to see. The men who worked in the metal trades were proud and talented people who, regardless of politics, believed in producing high quality and sound products that had their names proudly attached.

The bridge was built on time, on cost, and with reputations intact and growing. AJ would have been thrilled and many celebrations with his mates at the Brisbane Club would have followed.

On Saturday 6 July 1940 a crowd of 37,000 watched Sir Leslie Wilson, the Queensland Governor officially open the bridge.



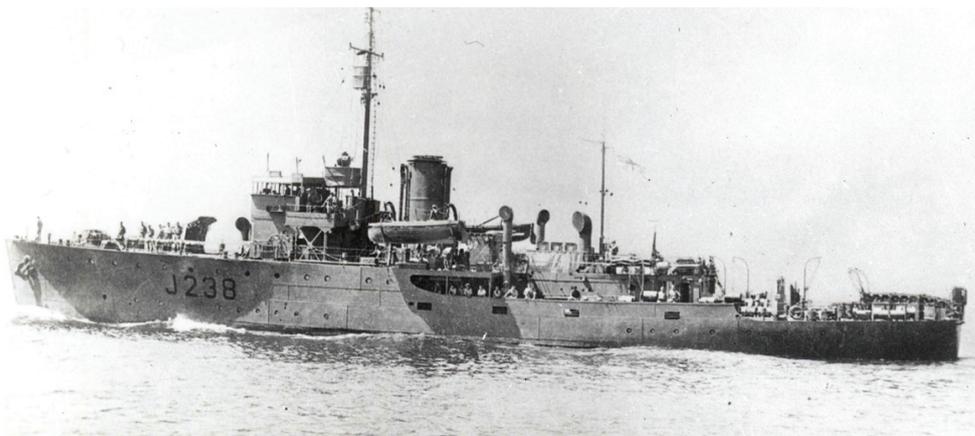
*Official Opening Ceremony of the Story Bridge, 1940.  
Courtesy: State Library, Brisbane*



## Man of Steel

The HMAS *Gympie* – A sad linking of personal and business.

In August, 1941 the HMAS *Gympie*, one of seventeen Bathurst class corvettes to be built, was laid down at Evans Deakin shipyards. It was completed in January, 1942 and launched by AJ's wife, Henrietta Deakin. Henrietta would no doubt have been thinking of her son on that day as he fought in the Pacific–New Guinea region where this corvette was destined. One imagines that she would have said a little prayer for the ship to watch over her son and keep him safe. The *Gympie* proved an exemplary escort ship and from November, 1942, when commissioned into the RAN till February, 1944, it escorted convoys off the Australian east and north coast. While none of her convoys were attacked under her protection, she came to the aid of the torpedoed US ship, *Peter Burnett* in January, 1943. The *Gympie* continued her role in New Guinea during the rest of the war. At the end of World War II, the *Gympie* participated in surrender ceremonies at Dili, East Timor. She received two battle honours for her wartime service: Pacific 1943–1945 and New Guinea 1943–1944. She was decommissioned in May, 1946.



*HMAS Gympie, 1941*