

Intro (William) Henry Butler
TBoBC DVD Launch
Marree, 24th July 2004.

It's not possible to talk about Tom Kruse, John Heyer and *The Back of Beyond* without recognizing Tom's driving partner in the film – that likeable larrikin Henry Butler.

William Henry Butler was born at Glenorminston Station in Queensland on July 1st 1915. He married wife Ethel in the late 1930s in Birdsville. Henry and Ethel's eldest son Patrick was born on July 26th 1944.

If he were alive today, Patrick – known as Paddy - would have been celebrating his 60th birthday on Monday.

You'll remember Paddy in *The Back of Beyond* – it's early in the film. Henry is in the front seat of the Badger and Tom pokes a stick under the tarp on the back of the truck –

“How ya 'goin Paddy? OK Tom OK”

Henry Butler had a stable working life – he was a good provider and father - and interacted well with the community at large.

Until John Heyer introduced Henry and stockman Malcolm as themselves in *The Back of Beyond*, most parts played by aboriginal people were stereotypes with spears, boomerangs and cooking kangaroos on an open fire.

I find it difficult in 2004 to really comprehend what was happening in Australia in the early 1950s. The film was released more than 20 years before aboriginal people even got the vote.

The Back of Beyond was somewhat matter-of-fact about the people of the Birdsville Track ... “be they white men, black men or Afghan”.

John Heyer dealt with them as he saw them. All were engaged in a battle with the elements – all were fighting just to survive. In this area, I believe the film broke new and important ground. The Ross Wood images and the lyrical Douglas Stewart & John Heyer words created sights and word pictures most of will never forget.

The Butler family lived in a number of places in the 1940s and 50s - including the Clare Valley, Beltana, Farina, Copley and here at Marree.

Henry worked in various jobs until he came to Marree to work with Tom. He had a good working relationship with Tom and stayed until it was time for both Paddy

and Eileen to start their "schooling" in Birdsville. The family moved from Marree to Birdsville in the early 1950s not long after the making of *The Back of Beyond*.

Eileen remembers her Dad being away for much of the time on the mail-run. The Butler children sometimes went on the trip with Henry – in fact whenever the opportunity arose.

Many people were bush mechanics – they needed to be – and Henry Butler was a good one. Director John Heyer recognised Henry's interest in things mechanical. The result was the 'coolabahs' sequence in the film.

"Good wood Coolabah."

Even in later years when he worked on Adria Downs Station with Mr. Bill Brook, Henry would spend days getting the old station blitz truck working when something went wrong. He kept it in working order.

Ethel Butler passed away on May 10th last year - just 10 minutes before Mothers Day.

Henry passed away in Adelaide at the St. Catherine Nursing Home at South Brighton - just over 10 years ago - on May 22nd 1994.

Son Paddy died six weeks later – it was a few days before his 50th birthday.

Henry Butler is buried in the Centennial Park Cemetery in Adelaide.

According to his children, Henry was a happy person. He always had a special place in his heart for the "kids" - and always provided for his family.

He was a hard-working man, with a good work ethic - and loyal to those with whom he was involved.

He was a gentle man, trustworthy and was liked by the community at large. He was a jovial person and was always ready for a good laugh.

He holds a special place in the hearts of all his children – and grandchildren.

Let's meet them now –

Eileen Butler, Betty Lindsay, Joyleen Booth, Robert Butler and grandson and newly appointed postman - Henry Butler