



# THE KALKIE SCHOOL HISTORIC PLAY-SHED PROJECT

THE STORY OF A SHELTER SHED, 12,000 WOODEN SHINGLES  
AND A VERY STEEP LEARNING CURVE.

## 1875

On 24 August 1875, H.A. Easter (Secretary), wrote to the Department of Public Instruction, enquiring what steps were necessary for the formation of a National School.

The Department was informed that the School Planning Committee had decided on a portion of land donated by Henry Easter, in an area of five acres, which was situated on Easter's Homestead Selection of 40 acres at Kalkie, "at the corner of the road leading to the Water Reserve"<sup>1</sup>, as a suitable position.

The proposed site for the school was situated four miles from the school in South Bundaberg, and six miles from that at North Bundaberg "with the river to cross"<sup>2</sup>. The local newspaper mentioned that "...51 children are already guaranteed, and the total number of scholars will probably exceed 120"<sup>3</sup>.

The school opened 11 February 1878, with Mr J. Y. Walker appointed as the Head Teacher, and in 1879 the School Committee advised the Department of Public Instruction that £15 "had been subscribed locally towards the erection of a play-shed, fencing and also some clearing in connexion with the State School..."<sup>4</sup>.

On 27 November, 1879, a tender submitted by Henry Hunt was accepted by the School Committee, the contract including fencing as well as the construction of a play-shed. Further instructions were given on 18 December 1879, when the Committee requested the use of bloodwood



instead of ironbark in the play-shed construct, as "...it was not so likely to catch fire..."<sup>5</sup> as ironbark.

On 16 March 1880, Richard Jones advised the Department that the play-shed and fences were completed according to specifications, but the Inspector of Buildings - Mr Ferguson - was unable to approve the work because of the following causes for concern:

*1st concerning the playshed, the contractor has substituted and inferior mortar in the floor "which is already broken up and some what dusty" for the 3".thickness of gravel as specified.*

*2nd the fascia at end of roof although neatly fitted down onto the shingling at foot and tolerably well mitred at ridge are so clumsily worked as to be reduced to as little as 1/4" in thickness or almost to a feather edge in places on lower edge of fascia... also the contractor has substituted split shingles for 1/2" sawn do. at projection beyond fascias and they are as irregularly*

*fixed as to leave the mould on fascia somewhat unprotected from the weather...*<sup>6</sup>

After repairing the shingles, replacing nails and redoing the floor of the play-shed, Henry Hunt was finally paid for his work in mid 1880.

## 1970

After many years of use, weathering by the elements and the odd stray spark from a nearby cane fire, the Play Shed was in need of considerable repair.

To avoid the demolition of the historic structure the Kalkie P&C, in particular Shed Restoration Organiser Barry Hough, wrote to many organisations asking for their help, including the Woongarra Shire Council and the Queensland Historical Society.

c/- Kalkie State School  
Bargara Road,  
Bundaberg, 4670  
6th February, 1970

East Bundaberg Rotary Club,

Dear Sir,

The Parents & Citizens' Committee of the Kalkie State School are seeking assistance in the restoration of the school playshed built in 1879. This building we feel is of historical significance as it is now nearing its 100th year and to our knowledge is the only building in the Bundaberg or Woongarra area with a wooden shingle roof. Its position on the Bargara Road lends itself to easy public viewing and to make it suitable as such some repairs to the wooden shingles and replacement of burnt portions is necessary.

The Department of Education has told our committee that they are neither prepared to spend time or money on its restoration as its original use as a children's shelter has now been filled by a large area under the school building.

Could your organisation therefore give consideration to making this restoration or part thereof, a project for the future? I am always available to furnish further information on this matter and can be contacted at the school.

Yours faithfully,

Barry T. Hough  
Shed Restoration Organiser

In February 1970, the P&C Committee wrote to

the Bundaberg East Rotary Club asking for their help in repairing the shed and replacing the shingles. Under the supervision of Club Member Mr Charlie Petersen, and with the assistance of parents and teachers from Kalkie School, club members decided to take on the task of learning the ancient craft of shingling.

Not only would the volunteers have to source suitable timber, they would have to cut 12,780 wooden shingles required for the roof. According to local historian Nev Rackemann, "Shingle cutting and fixing was a lost trade by 1970, and very few men knew anything about the art of fixing wooden shingles to the framework of a roof."<sup>7</sup>



The *Bundaberg News-Mail* reported that on 19th April, twenty volunteers went to Invicta and felled, billeted and loaded over 5000 super feet of timber in 3 foot lengths, in preparation for cutting into shingles at Kalkie School.

Volunteers had spent several weekends locating suitable logs which would split correctly into the lengths required. Local residents also provided help with the logging operations, and trucks for the haulage of the billets to Kalkie. After a general appeal to the public for specialised tools, Mr Les Hodgetts of Calavos, lent a shingle crown to test split



Logging and splitting bark



Carrying away bark for shingles



various types of timber.<sup>8</sup>

Under the supervision of Charlie Petersen, the volunteers cut more than 1000 shingles in a five hour period. The shingles ranged from 3-6 inches in size, and according to the *News Mail* report on 12th May, the recovery of shingles from the 18" billets cut by a sleeper saw, was considered to be particularly high.<sup>9</sup> Presumably this was considered to be a great achievement given qualified instructors in the trade were not available.

Work on the shingle cutting commenced under floodlights at Kalkie School each night after 6:30pm, and while everyone was welcome to come along and observe the reshingling project, they were more often than not encouraged to volunteer their services in some way.

Once the shingles had been stockpiled, the shingle fitting began - again under the supervision of Charlie Petersen and tile layer Mr J. Wilson.



Charlie Petersen cutting shingles

Images right from top: *Poor state of shingles before project commenced; Removing old shingles; The structure is ready for new shingles; Up on the roof laying shingles.*

The volunteers commenced their reshingling by repairing the gable aprons at each end of the building with the best of the original shingles. Then the task of laying the shingles began. Mr Keith Henderson, the Principal at the time, remembers in the Kalkie State School and Preschool 125th Jubilee book, that “splinters in the behind can only be removed by another person...”<sup>10</sup>

In a fast and furious two day span, the 20,000 shingles were laid and nailed into place by the P&C members and the Rotary Club members. At the official unveiling of the newly restored shed at the school fete, Mr Henderson delivered a commemorative poem about his experiences:

### ***Shingling At Kalkie***

*Out at Kalkie stands a playshed built in days of yesteryear  
With a roof of wooden shingles split by the pioneer;  
But ninety years of weather had caused a few to fall,  
An to the blokes of Rotary went this needy call.*

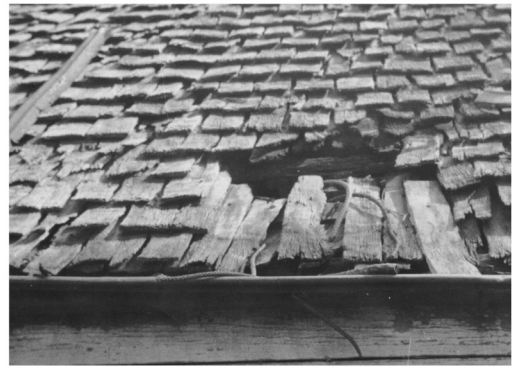
*“Can you split a shingle, mate,  
We must mend it now, not late.  
Will you lend a hand you blokes,  
Put your shoulders to the yokes?”*

*Charlie and his cobbers heard the needy call,  
And with the coves from Kalkie went bush for trees to fall.  
Clarrie took his chain saw, Noel his dirty big truck,  
Can Jack pick the splitters? - no such ruddy luck.*

*But the billets got to Kalkie, the paling throws were got,  
And the boys began to gather to try to split the lot.  
They did 10,000 shingles and all the ruddy throws.  
But the worst was now behind them, take it from one who knows.*

*Next Saturday the wood butchers arrived upon the scene,  
And up the roof they scrambled, they were so bloody keen  
The hammers fell like hailstones, the shingles nailed in place,  
The blokes worked hell for leather; it was like a flaming race.*

*Two days it took to cover, the roof looks really swell.  
And when our days are over, and we're on our way to hell  
The kids that play at Kalkie, a shingle shed will see  
Built by the men of Rotary and the Kalkie P&C.*



In all, the restoration of the 90 year old playedshed took about one month. Final statistics recorded 12,780 shingles used, cut from four logs of a total weight of 12 tons. The quantity of nails used in securing the roof was 86lbs (app. 39 kilos).

After completing the reshingling of the playedshed, volunteers were asked to sign a scroll which was placed on the ridge of the roof in a capsule when the shed was officially opened at the Kalkie School Jubilee Fete in June 1970.

Sue Gammon  
Bundaberg Regional Libraries

Volunteers from the Kalkie P&C and Bundaberg East Rotary Club on the roof of the shed.



### References:

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4. *Correspondence from H.A. Easter to the Department of Public Instruction.* Qld State Archives, 2 October 1879.
5. *ibid.*
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7. Rackemann, Neville *Neville Rackemann's Historical Notebook, Bundaberg.* Best Books, Bundaberg, 1985.
8. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 3 May 1970.
9. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 19 May 1970
10. *125th Jubilee Kalkie State School and Preschool.* 1970, p13.
11. *ibid.* p22.
12. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 27 April 1970.
13. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 11 May 1970.
14. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 23 May 1970.
15. Bundaberg East Rotary Club. 1970. *Restoration of Kalkie School Shed.*

### Images:

*All images are donated by the Rotary Club of Bundaberg East. Photographer - Barry Hough.*