

Bustard Head

Bustard Head Lighthouse



Queensland officially became a separate colony in 1859, inheriting a vast coastline but only a single lighthouse – the stone tower at Cape Moreton.

By 1864, with the growth of new ports such as Mackay and Bowen and an increase in marine traffic, new lighthouses were urgently needed. The Bustard Head Lighthouse, near the Town of 1770, was the first one built by the new Queensland Government in 1868.

Captain Cook named Bustard Head in 1770 in honour of a bustard (large turkey) which the landing party shot and subsequently ate declaring it “the best bird eaten since leaving England”.

Until 1986 when the Bustard Head light was automated, the light station was home to keepers, their assistants, their families and the occasional teacher for 118 years.

Documents in the Queensland State Archives’ collection provide an insight into life at the light station – the isolation, the cramped living conditions and subsequent tragedies endured by those families.

Today the station is managed by the Bustard Head Lighthouse Association Inc. and is open to tourists.



Bustard Head Lighthouse and cottages as they appear today. The original cottages were destroyed by fire in May 1932. Photo courtesy of 1770 Environmental Tours



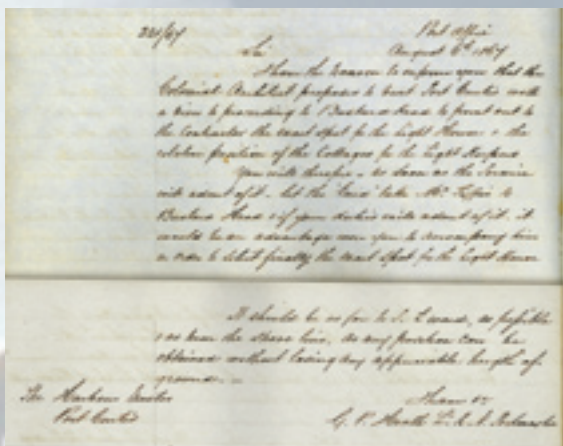
Estimates of the cost of erection of the cottages at the Bustard Head light station 1867.
5/100 Masonry in Chimney foundations 4/ 12 -
1/1 Masonry inside Roofs 4/ 8 -
1/6 1/2 Plaster flooring in shed 4/ 2 1/2
1/6 1/2 Slabbing outside Cottages 4/ 16 -
1/6 1/2 Studding & Weatherboards shed 4/ 120 -
7/6 1/2 Studding & Lining 4/ 22 1/2
5/6 1/2 Flooring & Joists 4/ 64 1/2
5/6 1/2 Roofing & Shingling 4/ 94 1/2



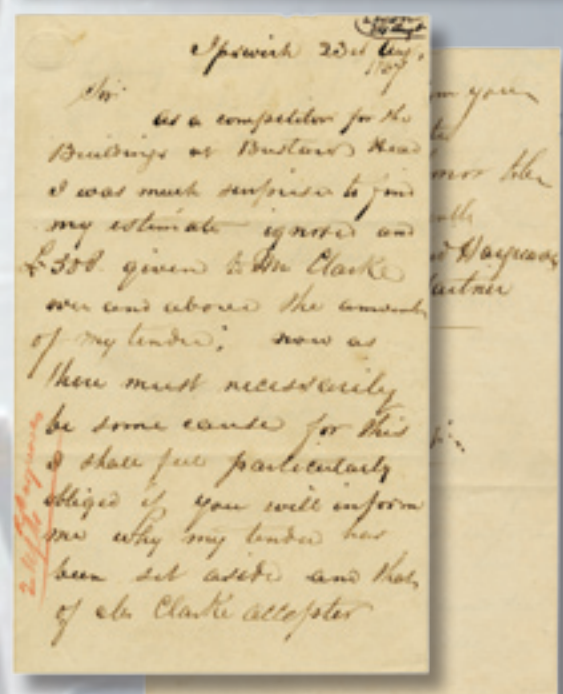
Dent Island Lighthouse built to the same specifications as Bustard Head. Queensland State Archives Item ID 436263

Cape Moreton Lighthouse, the first lighthouse built in Queensland. Queensland State Archives Item ID 436263

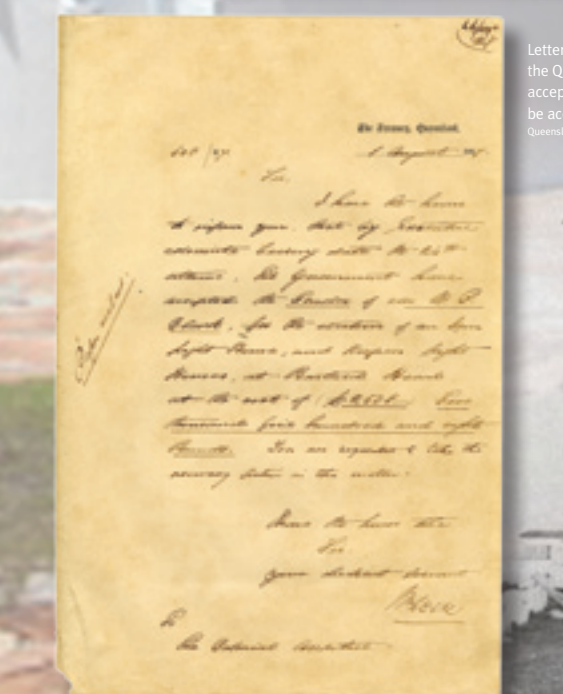
Estimates of the cost of erection of the cottages at the Bustard Head light station 1867. Queensland State Archives Item ID 436263



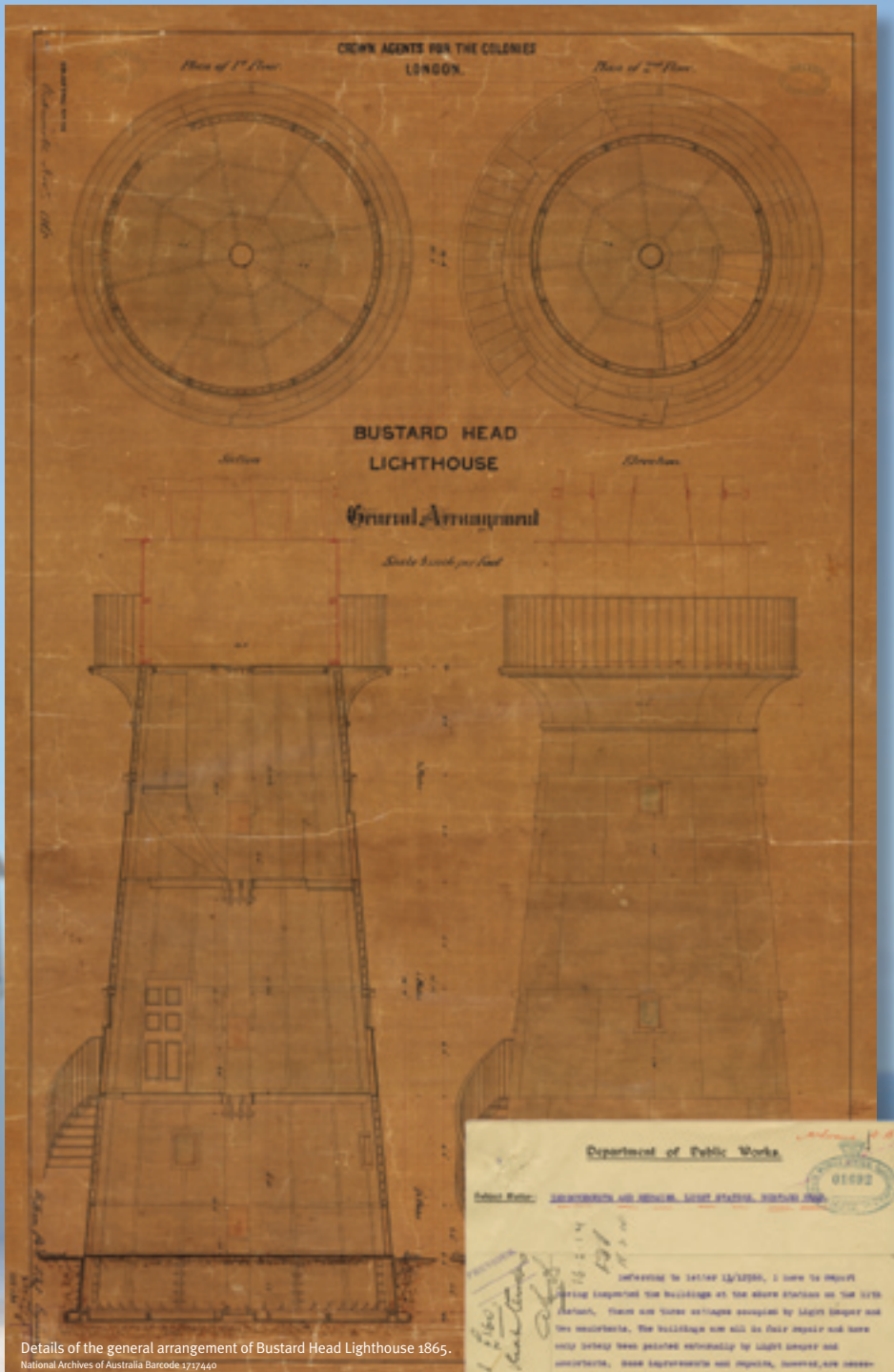
Letter advising of the proposed visit of the Government Architect to Bustard Head to show the contractor exactly where the light house and cottages were to be placed. Letter 221 of 1867 6 August 1867. Queensland State Archives Item ID 436263



Letter to the Colonial Architect from Richard Hargreaves questioning the awarding of the tender for the Bustard Head light station to Mr. Clarke. 23 August 1867. Queensland State Archives Item ID 436263



Letter to the Colonial Architect from the Queensland Treasury advising the acceptance of the tender of W P Clark be accepted. 1 August 1867. Queensland State Archives Item ID 436263



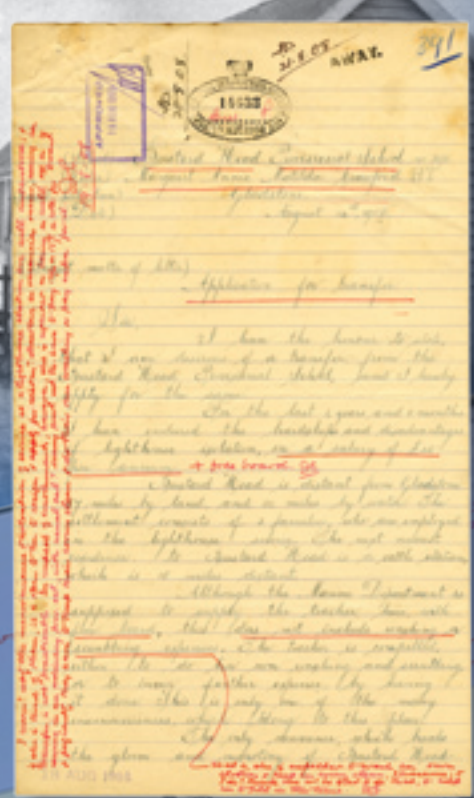
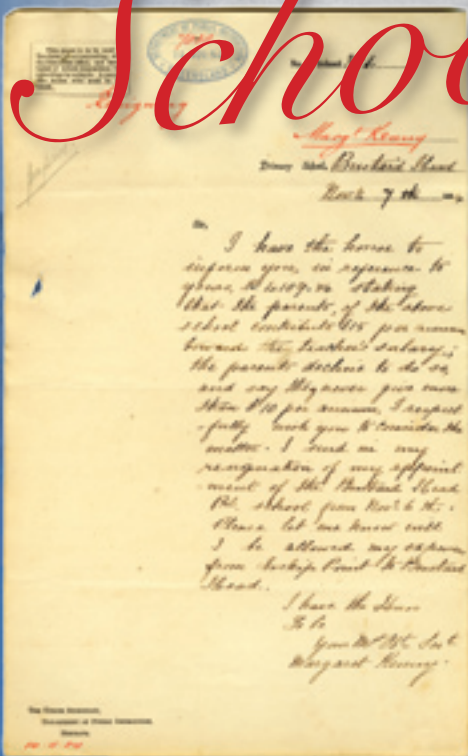
Details of the general arrangement of Bustard Head Lighthouse 1865. National Archives of Australia Barcode 137440

Bustard Head Lighthouse and cottages, 1934. John Doley Library, State Library of Queensland Neg 123887

Report of inspection of buildings at the Bustard Head light station by the Inspector of Works 14 February 1914. Queensland State Archives Item ID 436263



Schooling



Letter from Lavinia Summers, teacher at Bustard Head, reporting her return to the school after an attack of Dengue Fever. 6 April 1905. Queensland State Archives Item ID 14959

Letter from teacher Margaret Crawford requesting a transfer to another school as the wages and living conditions at Bustard Head are not to her liking. Her concerns were not sympathetically received. 14 August 1909. Queensland State Archives Item ID 14959

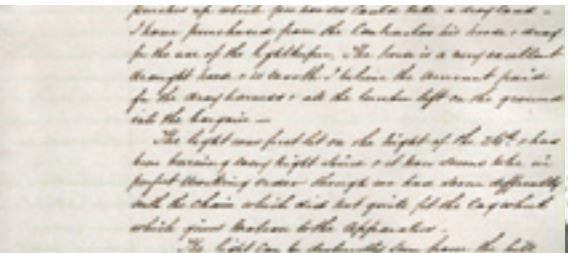
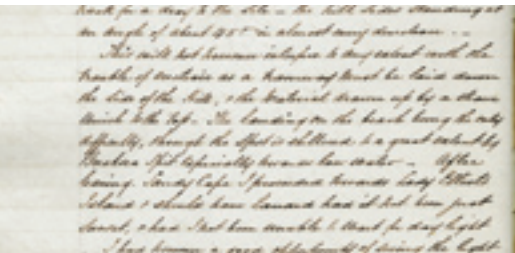
Bustard Head Provisional School No. 391 operated from 1882 until 1907 with 19 teachers posted there over that period. A Department of Public Instruction internal memo dated 14 March 1904 states that "It is very difficult to get suitable persons to stay for any length of time, without complaints and petty quarrellings and squabbings, seeing the life is much the same nature as life on board ship, with only a few on board."

Queensland State Archives Item ID 14959, Administration File, school: Bustard Head

Top left: Letter of resignation from Margaret Kenny, teacher of the Bustard Head school. 7 November 1884. Queensland State Archives Item ID 14959

Letter from Marianne Hensley declining the offer of reemployment at the Bustard Head school as her "recollections of the place are such as do not, by any means, create a desire to return." 19 March 1904. Queensland State Archives Item ID 14959

Telegram to the Department of Public Instruction from Nils Gibson requesting that Margaret Kenny's resignation as teacher at Bustard Head be countermanded. 11 November 1884. Queensland State Archives Item ID 14959



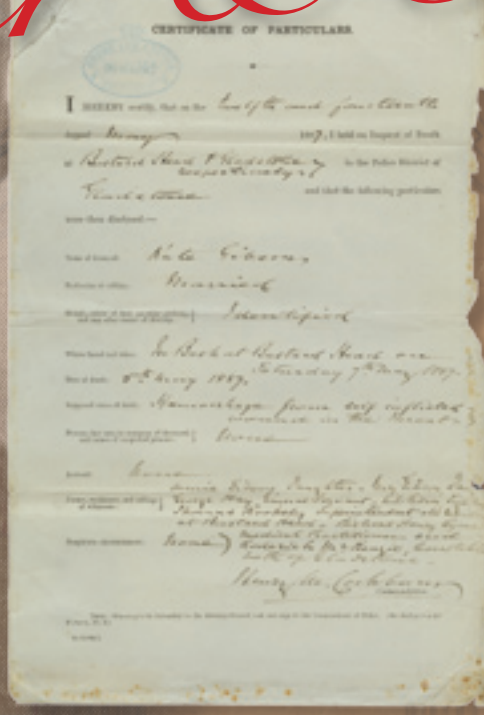
Letter to the Colonial Treasurer from the Portmaster at Port Curtis reporting on his visit to the Bustard Head site: Letter 199 of 1868. 29 June 1868. Queensland State Archives Item ID 991523

Lighthouse keepers' families at Bustard Head Lighthouse, Queensland 1898. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland Neg: 11973

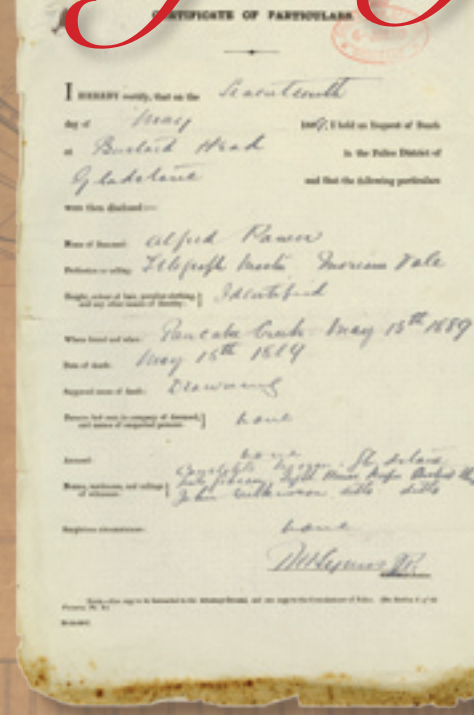
Lighthouse keeper, M. J. Rooksley at Bustard Head, Queensland, 1902. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland Neg: 115668

Murder & Tragedy

Designed to save lives, it is ironic that the Bustard Head lighthouse would see a series of tragedies during the 118 years that lightkeepers and their families lived at the station. Even before its completion, the lighthouse claimed its first life when a worker sustained a fatal head injury in 1868. It proved to be a harbinger for further tragedy. The records at Queensland State Archives show that illness, infant mortality, suicide, drowning, murder, abduction and even shark attack would follow.



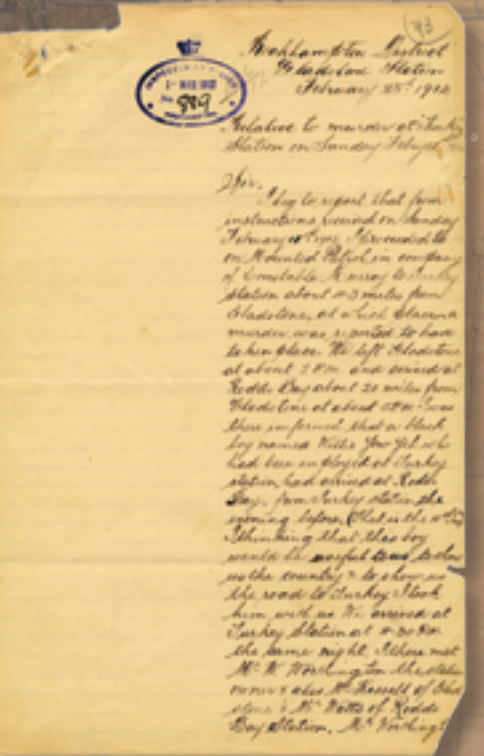
Certificate of Particulars from the inquest into the suicide of Kate Gibson, wife of Bustard Head lighthouse keeper Nils Gibson on 5 May 1887. Queensland State Archives Item ID 348742



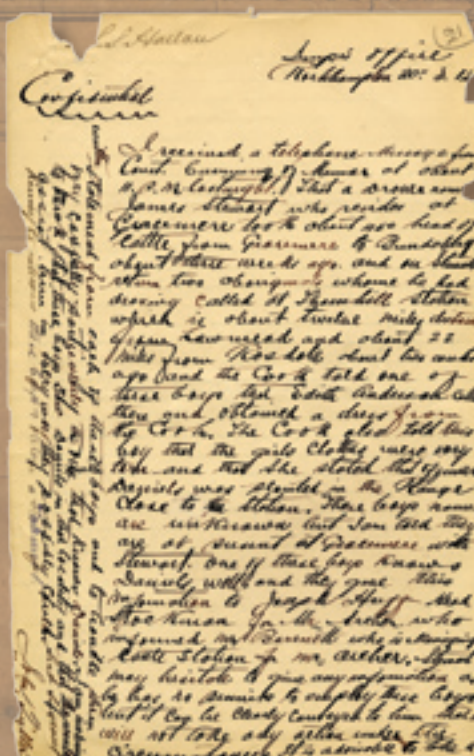
Certificate of Particulars for Alfred Power, drowned off Bustard Head on 15 May 1889. Elizabeth Wilkinson and Mary Gibson, daughter of lighthouse keeper Nils Gibson, were also drowned in this incident. Queensland State Archives Item ID 348766



Certificate of Particulars from the inquest into the death of Arthur Cogzell who was murdered on 11 February 1912. Queensland State Archives Item ID 349101



Letter relating to investigations into the murder of Arthur Cogzell of Turkey Station (near Bustard Head), 28 February 1912. Queensland State Archives Item ID 665908



Letter reporting a sighting of Edith Anderson and George Daniels, allegedly involved in the murder of Arthur Cogzell, 20 March 1912. Queensland State Archives Item ID 665908