

LOCAL HISTORY FEATURE



Historic Burnett Heads Lighthouse



(with reference to the New Lighthouse)

The Historic Burnett Heads Lighthouse served shipping on our part of the coast for 99 years from 1873 to 1972. When it was replaced by a more modern tower in 1972 the Bundaberg Historical Museum Committee, along with the Burnett Heads Progress Association and the Woongarra Shire Council instigated efforts to ensure the old lighthouse was preserved as an important part of our district's history. It still stands at Burnett Heads today, albeit on a different site, thanks to the efforts of these groups.

The Original Lighthouse

The historic lighthouse was sited on the Burnett River's south head in 1873. It was originally sited at Cowan Cowan on Moreton Island and when the decision was made to upgrade lighthouse facilities at Cowan Cowan, its old lighthouse was moved to Burnett Heads to become what is now known as the Old (Historic) Burnett Heads Lighthouse.

Made of timber in a hexagonal shape, it is 22 feet 6 inches high (approx. 6.8 metres). The Queensland Government operated the lighthouse until 1916 when the Commonwealth took over responsibility.

Originally the lamp burnt China (vegetable) oil (all Australian lighthouses used vegetable oil until the later nineteenth century). However, shortly after the lighthouse was relocated from Cowan Cowan to Burnett Heads the lamp was converted to kerosene operation. In 1932 the fuel for the light was converted from kerosene to acetylene gas which burnt brighter and cleaner. The lighthouse was still manned until the new lighthouse was built, as prior to technological advances keepers had to ensure that the light stayed lit and bright 24 hours a day.

Preservation Efforts

Eventually it was decided that the old lighthouse would be replaced with a new taller structure operated by electricity. The Bundaberg Historical Museum Committee and others did not wish to see the old lighthouse gone forever, and began plans to have it preserved for future generations. Part of these plans included finding a new home for the old lighthouse. In May 1971 the Regional Controller of the Department of Shipping and Transport, Mr J. V. Millen (or Milne, depending on newspaper reports), and a representative from the Department of Works inspected the proposed new site between the caravan park and the Burnett Heads hall on Zunker Street (now known as Lighthouse Park) and gave their approval.

They also inspected the old lighthouse, for which Mr Millen (Milne) brought the key. It was found to be in good condition and had new flooring and recently restored foundations. It was decided that the acetylene burner and prisms would be removed from the old lighthouse as they were not original parts, and that the Department would supply old style lights more in keeping with the period the lighthouse was originally built.



Old Lighthouse Base - next to new lighthouse. (P. Browne)

Removing the Old Lighthouse

In January 1972 it was reported in the *Bundaberg News-Mail* that volunteers had poured a six-sided concrete base foundation 14 feet (approx. 4.2 meters) across in readiness for the old lighthouse. However, it would still be a few more months until the lighthouse was moved. Its original foundation was to, and still does, remain in its original place next to the new lighthouse.

The Department of Shipping and Transport had asked that once the new lighthouse was finished the old lighthouse be kept on site for one month. This would enable the new lighthouse and machinery to be adequately tested to ensure its smooth operation before the removal of the old lighthouse. Also, according to a *News-Mail* report on 20 May 1971 the electricity which operated the new lighthouse was one reason the Department required the old lighthouse to be removed from site.

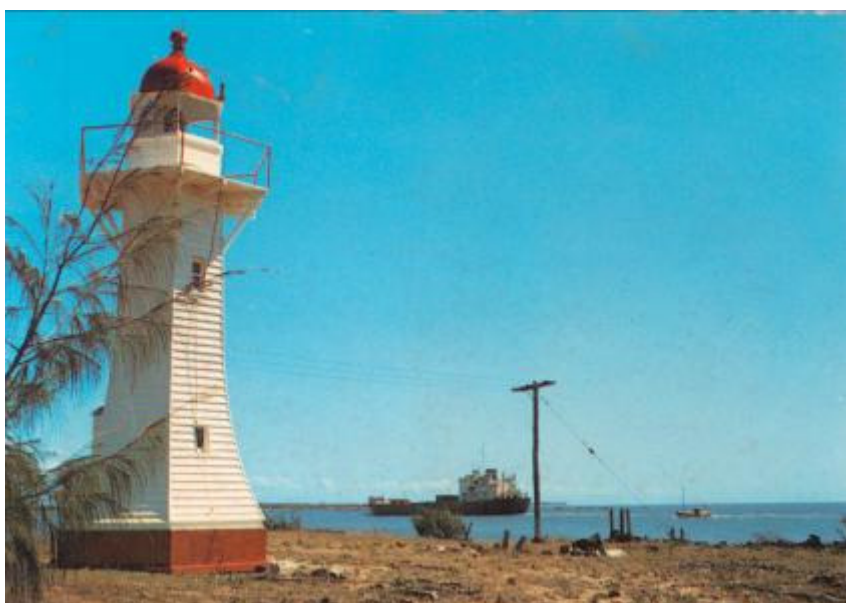
Removal of the old lighthouse began on Saturday 8 April 1972. Cranes had been donated by Peterson Bros Pty Ltd and the Harbour Board and volunteers from the Burnett Heads Progress Association also lent a hand. The job of removing the lighthouse from its original site and placing it on its new foundation was expected to take a couple of days. The front page of the *Bundaberg News-Mail* on Tuesday 11 April 1972 shows a fantastic photograph of the old lighthouse being lifted in one piece from its original foundation next to the new lighthouse.

Ceremony

The official opening ceremony of the historic lighthouse, to mark its preservation and relocation, was held on 22 April 1972. Special guest was Sir Raphael Cilento of the Queensland Division of the National Trust. Planned attractions on the day included an historical fashion parade, children dressed in fashion of the era of the original lighthouse, a display of side saddle horseback riding, and music by the Bundaberg Municipal Band. Vintage cars were also a feature and the plan was to have Sir Raphael Cilento travel from Bundaberg to Burnett Heads in one of the vintage vehicles.



Historic Lighthouse, 29 Nov 2009 (P. Browne).



The Historic Lighthouse in its original South Head location. Image copyright Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun00927.

Deed of Gift and National Trust Status

The Bundaberg Historical and Museum Society was responsible for the old lighthouse from its resiting in 1972 up until 1995 (the Deed of Gift was signed on 25 August 1995) when they gifted it to the Burnett Shire Council. In 2000 the Burnett Shire council received over \$16,000 funding to repair and repaint the lighthouse in conjunction with BACAS Training under the Community Jobs Plan (The year of the refurbishment is variously reported as 2000, 2000/2001, and 2001/2002.

However Majorie Kidd, longtime volunteer at the lighthouse, states the work took place in 2000). Now looked after by the Bundaberg Regional Council it received a fresh coat of paint in November 2009.

In August 2002 the old lighthouse received recognition of its heritage status when it was added to the National Trust of Queensland's Register of Significant Places. Marj Kidd, then Burnett Heads Progress and Sports Association secretary, prepared the successful submission to have the lighthouse added to the Register.

Valuable Historical Monument

The Old (Historic) Burnett Heads Lighthouse is a very valuable part of our history. It played a vital role in ensuring the safety of ships and their cargoes, crews and passengers. It also made certain Bundaberg was accessible to marine traffic which in turn helped our economy and society grow and prosper. The efforts of those involved in preserving the lighthouse should be very gratefully acknowledged.



The New Lighthouse

The new Burnett Heads Lighthouse, built in 1971, began operation around mid-January 1972. The *News-Mail*, on Thursday 13 January 1972, reported that the new lighthouse was successfully tested on the night of 12 January, and was now in operation. It was erected in order to enable ships approaching the coast and the Port to sight land more easily than the old lighthouse allowed. S. C. Lohse and Co., a Bundaberg building firm, won the contract, worth \$41,853, to build the new lighthouse. Eighteen metres high and made of concrete the new lighthouse is covered with white tiles for approximately the first 13 metres with red tiles covering the remainder to the top.

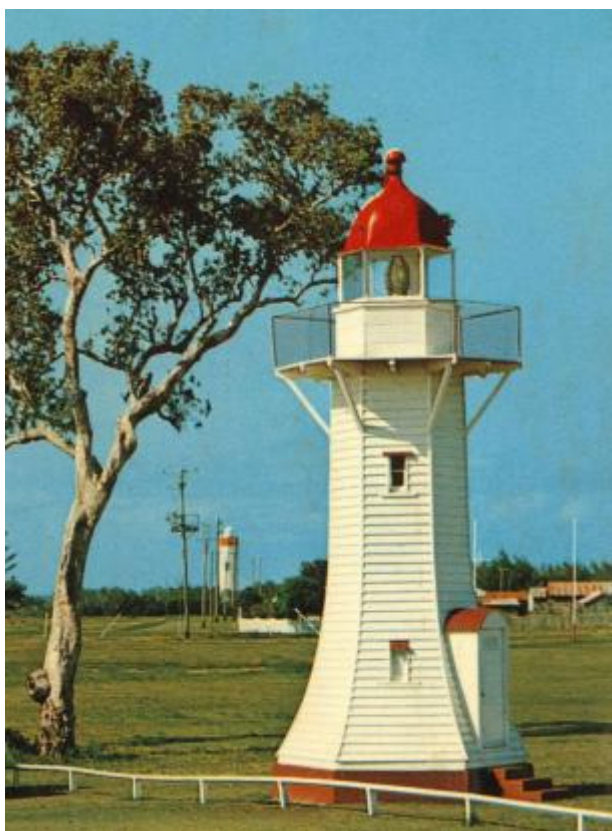
The newspaper report on 13 January 1972 stated that the lighthouse was powered with a 240 volt main supply in conjunction with a 1000 watt quartziodine lamp which had a range of 18 miles and flashed four times every 20 seconds. A diesel alternator provided backup in the event of a power failure. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority information sign currently on site states the light source

*The New Lighthouse,
29 Nov 2009
(P. Browne)*

is now a 12 volt 50 watt tungsten halogen lamp. This lamp flashes four times every 20 seconds and the focal plane of the lens is 20 metres above mean high water which enables the light to be seen from up to 18 nautical miles away.

Photos

If you have photos of the lighthouses, particularly the removal and resiting of the old lighthouse, and would like to donate them to the Library's Picture Bundaberg project (we can scan the photo and return it to you), we would be very grateful. Contact Sue Gammon on 4130 4136.



The Historic and New Lighthouses are within sight of each other at Burnett Heads. Image copyright Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun00147.

Old Lighthouse open to the public

Volunteers open the historic lighthouse to the public on the 4th Saturday of each month. Entry is for a small donation. Members of the public can view a wonderful pictorial history of the Historic Burnett Heads Lighthouse. The lighthouse is open from 9am to 12 midday.

References:

Deed of Gift document, Bundaberg and District Historical and Museum Society Inc., dated 25 August 1995

Bundaberg News-Mail, 20 May; 22 Jul 1971

Bundaberg News-Mail, 13, 21 Jan; 16 Mar; 8, 11, 14, 24 Apr 1972

Bundaberg News Mail, 14 Aug 2002

Bundaberg News Mail, 5 Dec 2009

Burnett Heads Lighthouse, <http://www.bundaberg.org/tourism/history>

Historical Burnett Heads Lighthouse, information sign located adjacent to Old Burnett Heads Lighthouse, Zunker Street, Burnett Heads

Kidd, Marge (Marj). 2006. *Burnett Heads Heritage Trail: Oaks Beach to the Lighthouses*, Brochure, http://www.burnettheads.asn.au/trail/Bunett_Heads_Brochure.pdf

Old Burnett Heads Lighthouse, The National Trust of Queensland, File Reference No. BUR 11

The New Burnett Heads Lighthouse, Lighthouses of Australia Inc, <http://www.lighthouse.net.au/lights/qld/burnett%20heads/Burnett%20Heads%20New.htm>

The Old Burnett Heads Lighthouse, Lighthouses of Australia Inc, <http://www.lighthouse.net.au/lights/QLD/Burnett%20Heads/Burnett%20Heads%20Old.htm>

South Head Lighthouse, information sign located with New Burnett Heads Lighthouse, Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Thanks to:

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Old Lighthouse in original Burnett Heads (South Head) location, date unknown. Image copyright Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun00442.



Old Lighthouse in current Burnett Heads location, Dec 2009. Image copyright Bundaberg Regional Council (C. Murray).