

From Virgin Scrub

A Social History of the Establishment of Kangaroo Inn Area School

By Mark Greenfield.



“Mark, do you realise we met 60 years ago today? You were in Grade 4 and I was your teacher!” It was Barbara Rohde (nee Dutton) calling on February 5th, 2023, the 60th anniversary of the first day of teaching at the brand-new Kangaroo Inn Area School. It had been Miss Dutton’s first day as a teacher and Mark Greenfield was one of 238 students (236 on buses and two Taylors on bikes) attending on day one.



KIAS as it is in its 60th year, 2023 (Image: KIAS Web page)

This social history, inspired by Barbara’s call, is based on the Greenfield family’s involvement with KIAS, but this family is no more important or special than any of the hundreds of other parents, students, teachers, support staff and friends who’ve been attending and sustaining this school for the past 60 years.

The plans for this school go right back to 1958, when a suggestion came from the District Inspector, Mr A. J. Whitelaw. He could foresee the need for a large central school in this area.

A provisional committee was formed from delegates of the Primary Schools in the District and they carried out work in finding sites for a central school.

Extract from the Official Opening programme (Opening delayed until 22nd October 1965).

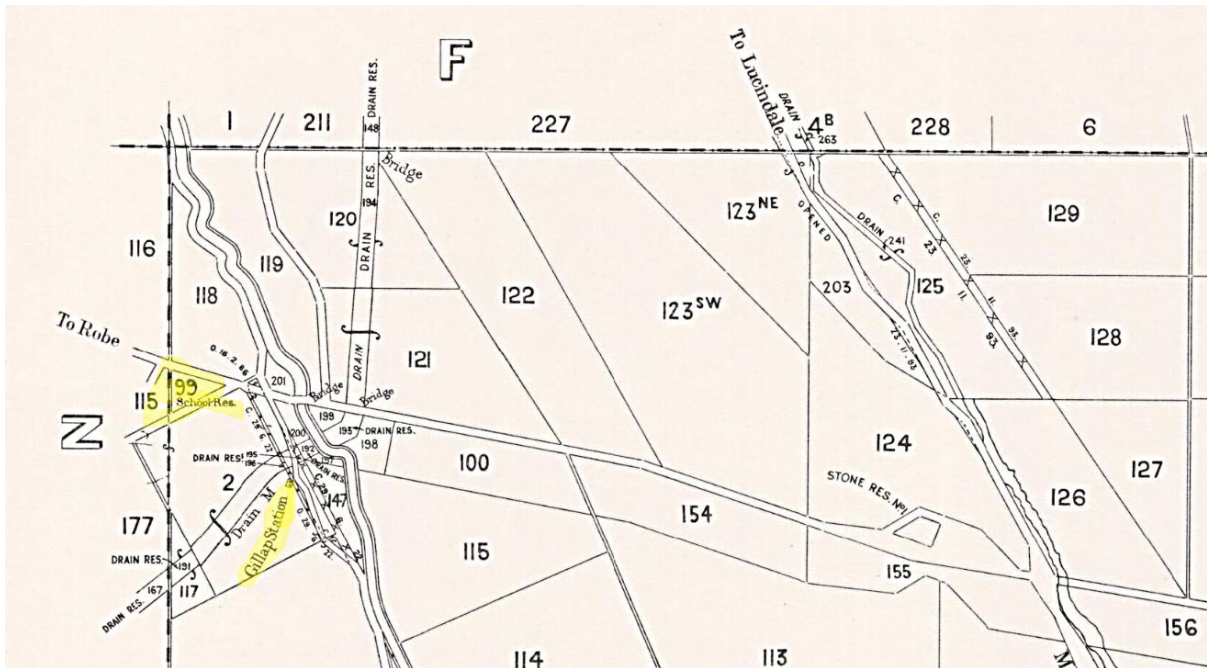
Planning for a school to meet the needs of the rapidly developing areas of Bray, Reedy Creek, Conmurra, Furner, Greenways and Mount Bruce, was initiated by the District Inspector, Mr A J Whitelaw in 1958. Mark's father Clarry Greenfield was the Secretary and Mr B Thompson the Chairman (School Journal 2/2/1963) of the "Provisional Committee" charged with identifying a suitable site in the *Gillap Station* area. Clarry's diaries record attending many meetings at Beachport Primary School from January 1956, including with Inspector Whitelaw in April 1957, another in February 1958, and twice more in March prompting him to record "*School Committee meeting and what a meeting with bus talk.*" The "*Lagoon Crisis*" was discussed at the Beachport meeting on November 5th, 1958.

Possibly the most important meeting Clarry attended was at the Kangaroo Inn ruins on September 7th, 1959, to select the school site. A few weeks later he sent "*five letters away for Kangaroo Inn Area School*" and attended KIAS meetings in September and October 1959. On April 10th, 1960, he recorded having an argument about "*Kangaroo Inn*" with "*Bill*" at a local tennis game and on October 5th Ralph James (late of *Cooranga*, Lucindale) came with him to a "*big Furner meeting for Kangaroo Inn.*"



Clarry Greenfield in 1963 (Image: M Greenfield) and the Kangaroo Inn ruins which have been preserved by the school community since the school was established in 1963 (Image: South Australia, Destinations web page).

The site selected was Section 99, Hundred of Kennion, County Grey, at the intersection of Clay Wells (Robe-Penola) and the Beachport-Penola Roads; the owner of this small subdivision of approximately 18 acres (7 hectares) was Max Engelhardt, the owner of *Gillap Station* who, according to his grandson John Andre (Ceres Station), was initially concerned the noise of large numbers of school children would disturb his sheep-farming operations.



North-west segment of a 1968 “Hundred of Kennion” map showing KIAS school reserve on Section 99. The sections on this map were designated in surveys prior to 1892.

Area Schools, combining primary and secondary on one site, were a relatively new initiative in the late 50s, early 60s; the Kingston school at that time was identified as a “Primary plus High School”, later to be re-identified as Kingston Area School. The proposed school for the “*Gillap Station area*” was promptly titled Kangaroo Inn Area School after the ruins located immediately to the south-east of Section 99.

On Sunday, August 6, 1961, evidence was given to the Public Works Standing Committee at the site chosen by the Department, opposite the ruins of the old Kangaroo Inn. From this meeting the school was included in the estimates for 1961/1962.

After the site had been completely cleared of virgin scrub, extensive earth works were carried out and the actual building was begun in March 1962.

At a Public Meeting held at Furner, on August 30, 1962, Mr B. Fitzgerald, Supt. of Rural Schools, said that in this rapidly developing area there was a crying need to serve it better. Any other extension in education would have only been Primary if the Kangaroo Inn Area School had not been provided. The site is unique and its position is central.

The School Committee has received wonderful support from the parents both from their willingness to work and to give financial aid. It is a credit to the Government, staff, parents and children what has been achieved by this school in three years. With confidence it can be said that this will be one of the most beautiful and unique schools in this State.

Extracts from the Official Opening programme, 22nd October 1965.

Although the local committee had selected this site in September 1959 the school was not included in the Government estimates until August 1961 when funds were allocated for the 1961/62 financial year. Shortly after this the site was “*completely cleared of virgin scrub*” and “*extensive earth works were carried out and the actual building was begun in March 1962.*” This building and landscaping work had not been completed in time for the start of school in February 1963 and according to Barbara Rohde (Miss Dutton), at the first staff meeting a few days before school started the painters were frantically working around them and “*flies were sticking to the paint*”.

The school’s new parents had, and continued for months and years, to work on improvements and facilities, such as installing the playground, erecting the goal posts, planting gardens, etc. The students were also enlisted into the working-bees and participated on Arbour Day to help replace the “completely cleared” native scrub. This effort prompted the Headmaster Rex Hosking, to state in his 1963 report “*The parents have been extremely helpful in a very difficult period of the school and I would very sincerely thank all people who have worked hard for the sake of the school.*”

Those difficulties included the school not being on the new ETSA power grid, requiring diesel generators that were quite difficult to start. And the initial phone connection was a Party Line shared with the neighbours – Mr Andre at Ceres apparently got annoyed at having the school pick-up his calls; this was due to the staff not being able to hear the phone properly to count the number of rings that indicated who the call was for.



1965 News-clipping (Image: Trevor Briggs, Facebook) and playground in use (Image: KIAS Archive)

The establishment of a centralised Area School could not be realised without significant disruption for many families and communities and was not welcomed by all those affected as it was to cause a significant drop in numbers attending existing schools at Robe, Beachport, Reedy Creek (included Conmurra district) and Millicent, plus Furner and Mt Bruce were required to close their schools permanently at the end of 1962.

Another negative factor for those intending or already sending their children to board in Millicent, Adelaide and elsewhere for secondary education, was the loss of a subsidy due to the availability of the new high school within a certain distance of students' homes.

All four Greenfield siblings attended Beachport Primary School, with Angie, Paul and Jim completing their primary years there, but as Mark was only in Grade 3 in 1962 he was one of the many children from east of the *Woakwine Range* who left the school at the end of that year to attend KIAS.



Students and teachers outside Beachport School c1920 (Image: SLISA, B-61671)

The Beachport school building was opened in 1881 and the headmaster in the 1950s and 60s, Mr Arnold Truman, taught Grade 6 and 7 in that classroom; additional prefabricated classrooms had been added in 1952 and 1958. A new Beachport school, to be built on a 5-acre site in the western corner of the recreation reserve, was discussed by the school committee as early as May 1965 (C Greenfield's diary) and approved in 1960 but as Kangaroo Inn became more likely Beachport's enrolment was predicted to reduce by about 30 pupils and this new school was abandoned. The enrolment was about 90 in 1962 but had reduced to 68 at the time of KIAS's official opening in 1965. Beachport's new primary school did eventuate, opening on the selected site in 1976.



Beachport Grade 1/2 class, 1961; many of these children relocated to KIAS in 1963. (Image: Colleen Hammat)

The Reedy Creek school had about 60 enrolments in 1962 but many of the children from the Conmurra and Biscuit Flat districts were relocated to KIAS, reducing the school to just 30 students in 1963 and the school was closed at the end of 1970 due to lack of students.



Reedy Creek had two teachers and 59 students in 1961 (Image: Ann White)

Furner School had been established in 1889 and although it was not in continuous use, had a healthy population in the 1950s with another classroom erected and a second teacher appointed for the infant grades. According to the KIAS Official Opening programme Furner School carried on very successfully until the establishment of Kangaroo Inn Area School. The teachers present on the last day of school were Mr M. Dodman (Head Teacher) and Miss Gethings, neither of whom joined the KIAS staff. Furner also had a local store that possibly lost customers and income due to the closure of the school.



57 children in the 1961 Furner School photograph; most would have gone to KIAS in 1963. (Image: Peter Bateman)

Mount Bruce had a school from 1954; *“A one-roomed timber framed building was erected on land donated by Mr N. R. Grieve. This was a Class VI School, catering for 22 pupils under Mr K. Cock as Head Teacher.” “The school was elevated to a Class V in 1962 and, although a much more stable standard was promised at the new Area School, it was with regret that the supporters of Mount Bruce undertook the necessary formalities for closing the school which served the district for nine years.”* (Source: Official Opening programme)



Mt Bruce school had 14 students on day one in 1954 (Image: Bill Anderson, Facebook). The Bray district did not have a local school but before KIAS was opened the Bray-to-Robe bus was carrying 50 pupils a day. As a result of these numbers leaving the Robe School only three teachers were required by 1965 and the Bray bus was transporting 64 students to the new Area School. One of the Robe teachers, Miss Bruce, was reassigned to KIAS for the start of the 1963 school year.



Bray Hall at the centre of this significant source of KIAS students (Image: Google Maps Street View 2023).

Greenways township was surveyed in 1957 and a school was not approved for the district; no doubt children went to Reedy Creek or Furner depending on where their farms were, and the establishment of KIAS would have provided a welcome benefit for this district.

Quite a few of the “first day” students were from the Thornlea district (about five miles to the west of Kangaroo Inn); these included Mark Greenfield who attended for Grade 4, 5, 6 and 7. The bus-run (initially owned and operated by a man only remembered as “*Soursob*”) started each day with high school students only from Beachport and then collected students off the farms through the Woakwine Range, Magarys Lane and Piccanniny Lane; it diverted towards Furner at the Thornlea Telephone Exchange, then left towards Adelaide on the Princess Highway before a right-turn to follow Drain-M to the school. This route didn’t pass *Kestal* so Mark was driven the two miles to the highway in the morning as this meant a later start; after school he got off at the telephone exchange as it was a shorter walk home. Eventually Mark got a push-bike for his birthday – so he could ride to and from the bus stop.



The Beachport to KIAS bus in 1965 (Image: Trevor Briggs, Facebook).

Despite the social upheaval, relocation of children and resources, and the lack of an existing town (KIAS is still the only Area School in South Australia not located in a town) the school community united and thrived, with events such as the annual “Speech Night” being held at a packed Furner Hall. Here in about 1964 Mr Rohde proved that “*many hands make light work.*” [Note: not a suitable skit for today due to an Asian overtone but it certainly amused the audience that night.]

Perhaps the same evening Mark's class performed a Beatles hit, "*Love, Love Me Do*" – the *Fab Four* had plastic Beatle mops (hair), Big Pretzel (complete with coconut shell breasts and hay-tie wig) did the Go-go and Mark introduced the number as the band's manager Brian Epstein. John Major was a hit in a skit about prospective renters waiting at a "To let" sign, until the Janitor came and replaced the missing "i" from toilet.

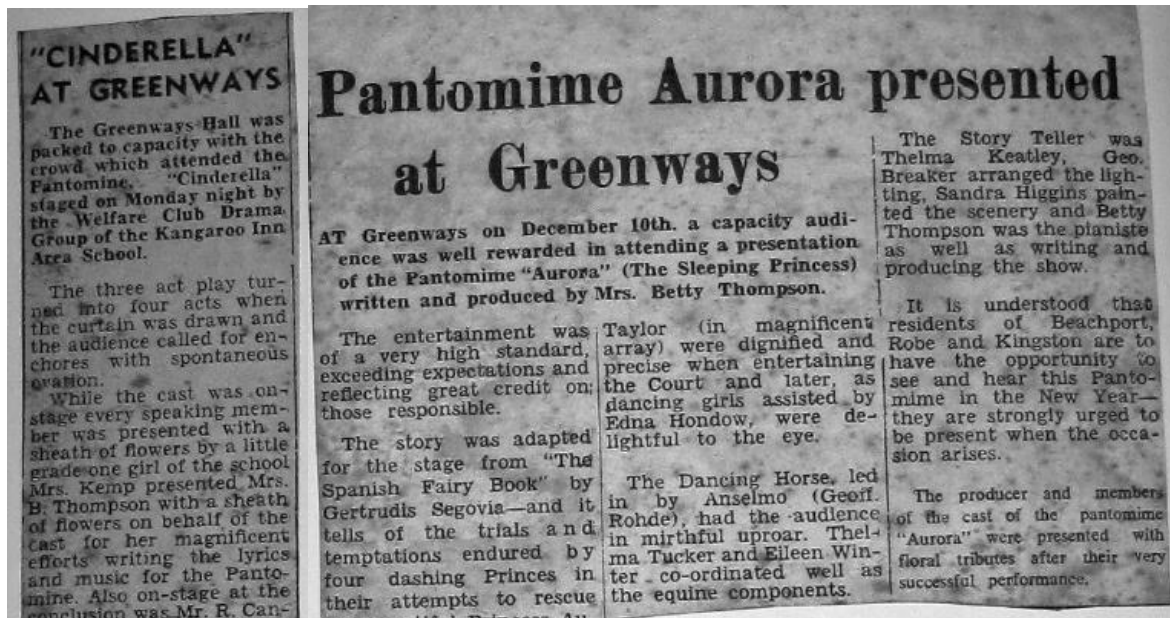


Furner Hall much as it was in 1963 (Image: Internet).

"*Cinderella*", a pantomime written and produced by Mrs Betty Thompson was performed by the school's Welfare Club Drama Group with a cast of 21 performers that very first year of 1963. It "played" at Greenways – and also Robe by popular demand. Betty created a second equally successful pantomime, "*Aurora*" in 1964. Once again, many parents and staff were involved including Barbara Rohde as "*the beautiful Aurora*", her new husband Geoff Rohde (joined the staff in 1964) as the Lion and Clarry Greenfield was the Ogre (a fall the monster took gave him a "crook" hip for weeks).



Greenways Memorial Hall looking a bit worse for wear in 2014 (Image: monumentaustralia.org.au)



Headlines reporting the great success of these two pantomimes.

The original staff numbered ten with Rex Hosking the first Headmaster, supported by three male teachers, Chris Williams, Terry Keen and Graham Pace, each of whom had a House named after them; and six female teachers, Miss Gare, Fay Kenyon, Barbara Dutton, Elizabeth Bruce, Barbara Martin and Joanna Keen. No "support staff" were appointed although there probably were contract cleaners and possibly a groundsman although parents may have carried out much of this work.



The staff for the 1963 school year (Image: B Rohde).

Kangaroo Inn Area School's first Headmaster, Rex Hosking, came with extensive teaching experience having taught at Olary, Kingston, Willunga, Urrbrae (transitioned to secondary teaching), Whyalla, Pinnaroo and at Cambrai Area School as the Principal. He also came as a bachelor but married a local, Dorothy Horridge (nee Varcoe), before being reassigned to Cummins Area School on the West Coast for the 1966 school year. Rex was disappointed to leave believing the school's best year was just ahead. [Note: At the time of writing Rex was in good health aged 92, living in Myrtle Bank, Adelaide.]



News clipping reporting the end of the first Headmaster's term at Kangaroo Inn Area School in 1965 (Image: Trevor Briggs, Facebook).

Rex was still Headmaster for the school's official opening which did not take place until 22nd October 1965, well into the school's third year of existence. This was a momentous occasion for the community attended by all students, their families and friends, plus local and State dignitaries. In fact, it was so important the Official Opening was performed by no-less-than the South Australian Governor, His Excellency Lieutenant-General Sir Edric Bastyan, K.C.M.G, K.C.V.O.K, B.E, C.B.



His Excellency Lieutenant-General Sir Edric Bastyan and Lady Bastyan arrived with his wife in the Governor's Rolls Royce; (Images: Official Opening programme and Trevor Briggs, Facebook).

KANGAROO INN AREA SCHOOL

THE STAFF

Mr W. R. HOSKING, B.A., H.M.
 Mr C. W. WILLIAMS, S.A.
 Mr R. A. HASLAM, A.U.A.
 Mr R. J. MITCHELL
 Mr R. J. THOMPSON, A.U.A.
 Mr R. J. BASTIAN
 Mr G. E. ROHDE
 Mrs B. ROHDE
 Mrs P. A. LANG
 Mrs E. QUINLAN-WATSON
 Miss S. HIGGINS
 Miss J. A. ARNOLD

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Messrs B. Thompson (Chairman), L. Anderson (Sec.), P. Lord (Vice-Chairman), J. Braham, H. Brown, L. Hamilton, N. Major, H. Gregurke, D. Ogilvie, W. Walker, Mesdames T. Keadley (Treasurer), M. Matthews.

WELFARE CLUB

President: Mrs K. Taylor.
 Secretary and Treasurer: Mrs P. Lord.

PROGRAMME

10.15 a.m.—
 Reception of His Excellency, Lieutenant-General Sir Edric Bastyan, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., K.B.E., C.B., Governor of South Australia, and Lady Bastyan.
 Presentation of principal guests to His Excellency in the Foyer.

10.30 a.m.—
 His Excellency and Lady Bastyan sign the Visitors' Book.

10.35 a.m.—
 National Anthem led by the School Choir.

10.40 a.m.—
 Address of welcome by the Head Master, Mr W. R. Hosking, B.A.

10.50 a.m.—
 His Excellency is welcomed and introduced by the Chairman of the School Committee, Mr B. Thompson.

10.54 a.m.—
 Song by the School Choir.


10.58 a.m.—
 Address and Official Opening by His Excellency Lieutenant-General Sir Edric Bastyan, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., K.B.E., C.B.

11.10 a.m.—
 Vote of thanks to His Excellency tendered by the Chairman of the Beachport District Council, Councillor M. Bateman.

11.15 a.m.—
 Morning Tea.

11.45 a.m.—
 Departure of His Excellency and Lady Bastyan.

The School will then be open for inspection.



*Kangaroo Inn Area School,
 erected 1962 and occupied in February, 1963.*

The Official Programme identifies the Staff of 1965 (still led by Rex Hosking), the School Committee and Welfare Club members plus the involvement of the Chairman of the Beachport District Council who tendered the vote-of-thanks to His Excellency.



The Official Opening was a well-attended event with the oval used as a car park; this photo is of the Main Gates decorated with the Australian Coat of Arms (Image: Trevor Briggs, Facebook).

A highlight of Mark's four years at KIAS was a school camp to Adelaide in January 1966. Barbara and Geoff Rohde escorted a bus-load of children for about four or five days staying at *Nioka* in Stirling. They took the children from there to many iconic places including the Adelaide Fire Station, Coca Cola factory, and drove on-board the *MV Troubridge* (Kangaroo Island and Pt Lincoln car-ferry) at its Port Adelaide wharf. They celebrated Barbara's birthday while away and provided a "guard-of-honour" at the wedding of another KIAS teacher, Miss Jill Arnold to Paul Tattersall. Geoff and Barbara then drove the children down Hindley Street in the bus to see the movie *Mary Poppins* where they were chaperoned by Barbara and Geoff's mothers. Barbara and Geoff then drove themselves to Jill's wedding reception – in the bus.

The trip home from Adelaide was in a brand-new school bus with all the bags stowed in the aisle. It was a wonderful experience Mark has not forgotten.



MV Troubridge passing Birkenhead Bridge (Image: SLSA 73766) & 1964 *Mary Poppins* poster (Image: Internet).

While many of the original students completed their high schooling at KIAS quite a few were sent to boarding school, as was Mark Greenfield who on completion of Grade 7 in 1966 commenced five years boarding at Saint Peters College in 1967. Shortly after completing matriculation, he went to work for BHP in the Whyalla Shipbuilding and Engineering Works but as that industry went into decline Mark returned to work the family farm in 1977.



KIAS Grade 7 with Mr Davis, 1966. (Image: M Greenfield).

Mark's connection with KIAS recommenced with his wife Sharon joining the staff in 1980; their children Leo and Thomas attended from pre-school in the 1980s until the family relocated to Adelaide in 1995. Mark was on the School Council for two years in 1992 and 1993, including being Council Chairman for the school's 30th year.

The family were all involved with the first major anniversary commemorated by the school community; the first 25 years were celebrated with an extensive programme on Saturday October 15th, 1988, culminating in a "Sixties Social" with local band *FBI* and a Blue Light disco for the under 18s. The KIAS community also celebrated the 30th, 40th and 50th anniversaries in 1993, 2003 and 2013 and is commemorating the 60th throughout 2023.

A special feature of the 40th celebration was the "guest-speaker" attendance of the first Headmaster Rex Hosking and the three male teachers for 1963, Graham Pace, Terry Keen and Chris Williams. Two of the original female teachers, Libby Quinlan-Watson and Barbara Rohde, were unofficial guests-of-honour at the 50th Anniversary on April 13th, 2013.



KIAS student Libby Morgan and Barbara Rohde (Miss Dutton,1963) cutting the 50th Anniversary cake and Mark Greenfield with Barbara and Libby Quinlan-Watson (Miss Bruce, 1963) at the celebration. (Images: M Greenfield).