

CHAPTER 2 PREFABS IN A LEAFY OASIS

The school first known as Risdon Park School and later as Risdon Park Primary School, took its name from the local area. The origin of the name 'Risdon' is not absolutely clear. It was however the name given to one of the first houses built in the area in 1902 on Balmoral Road. The owners of that house had honeymooned at Risdon in Tasmania and it is thought the house was named for that memory, according to Nancy Wood in her book 'People of Port Pirie'.

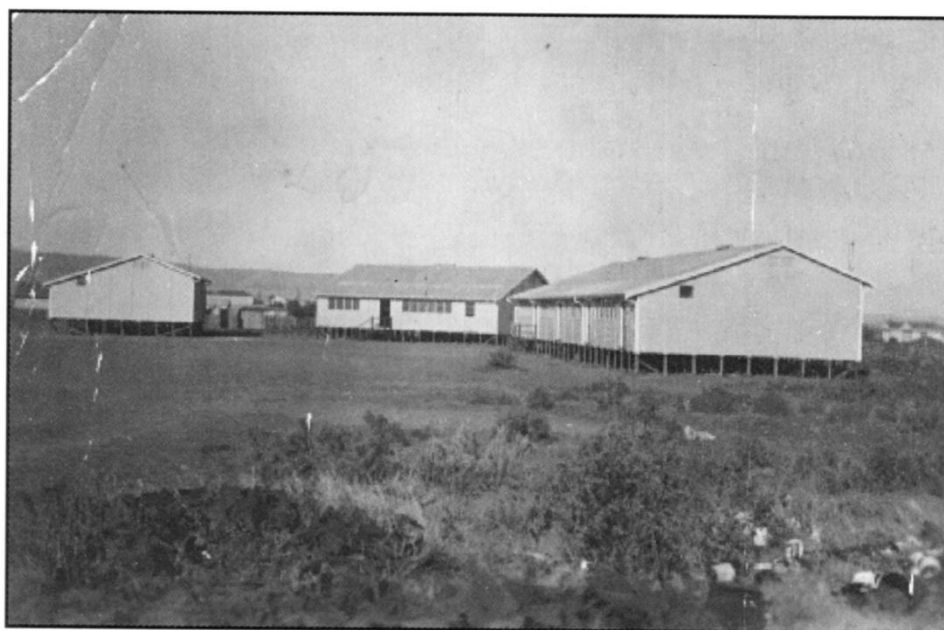
The school site was part of a rural area in the 1900's. In the

1920's the area was still mostly paddocks across which Ms Ruby Williams used to walk to Solomontown Primary School after she started school in 1926.

Ruby remembers that she and her brothers and sisters used to collect the bones of dead sheep and cattle from the paddocks and sell them to the soap factory which was located on the school site at that time. It has been reported that in the early years of the school, students often unearthed bones when they were planting trees and establishing gardens.

After the Second World War more and more farming land in Risdon was being subdivided to provide suburban blocks for the building of houses for the growing population. The area on

which the school was established was Section 120 of township of Williamstown. This section had in fact already been subdivided by a developer in the late 1940's into house lots with the proposed road (Fitzgerald Street) running parallel to Butterick right through to the next street. The Minister for Education purchased lots 120 to 139 on Fitzgerald Street and lots 150 to 159 on Kingston Road. In addition 'Fitzgerald Street' across that section was also sold and designated a 'closed road'. This remains the legal



description of the land to this day and should someone decide to re-open that 'closed road' they would find it runs straight through Unit 3!

All roads in the surrounding area at this time were dirt and no services (for example, electricity) were connected. The newly developing Risdon Park must have resembled nothing so much as an outback town.

The 1950's were a time of growth and prosperity in South Australia. The government of (Sir) Thomas Playford was enjoying an extended period in office - a government keen to promote development in all areas of the state. Such were the demands for more schools everywhere that the Education Department opted for a 'short-term' solution by providing 'temporary' classrooms in the shape of the well-known 'pre-fabs' - some of which still grace some school yards today. In Risdon Primary's case these 'quads' were *in situ* for twenty one years.

And so Risdon Primary School was born - transportable buildings set down in a barren landscape and provided with minimal facilities. Areas were set aside for school administration, a library and a staff room as well as classrooms.

Parents were not deterred - they were excited! Everything was new and they turned their hands enthusiastically to providing equipment and amenities for their children. There was a wonderful spirit of co-operation at work and the parents came of a generation used to the "do-it-yourself" philosophy. They had no notion of waiting quietly for the

government to 'get around' to doing things.

The School Committee kept up a steady flow of correspondence to the Education Department over the years about such issues as water supply, fencing, bitumenising the school yard and providing permanent buildings. A master plan was drawn up for beautifying the school grounds.

In the meantime regular working bees set to work to make the school grounds more habitable. Some of the big trees which give the children shade today were planted in the very first year of the school.

As Mel Middleton recorded in the School Journal in 1955:

April 28 Mrs Brocklebank offered a wattle and some jacaranda trees to the school. I passed the information on to the Secretary of the School Committee. It is hoped to hold Arbor Day after filling is completed.

On October 5 1956 on Arbor Day, the School Committee:

planted 106 trees on the perimeter of the school grounds.

A R B O R D A Y 1956

Will be held at RISDON PARK SCHOOL next Friday 5th October. 1956. Parents are invited into class rooms from 10.30a.m. to 11.00a.m. Special lessons on birds and trees will occupy the morning period. Recess will be from 11.00a.m. to 11.30a.m., when members of the Welfare Club School Committee will be entertained at morning tea by the staff.

School assembly will be held at 11.30a.m. Mr. Christie, Gardener from the B.H.A.S. will speak on "The Transformation of Memorial Park". Two trees will be planted under the special patronage of the Staff and Committee. Tree name plates, prepared by Committee efforts will be placed by the 100 trees already planted. The ceremony should conclude before 12.30p.m.

RISDON PARK SCHOOL.

19th March, 1959.

Dear Father/Mother,

The school oval which was planted with couch grass just over 12 months ago is progressing exceptionally well and is now being used by the boys for football and cricket and by the girls for basketball and athletics.

We have however, experienced considerable trouble in obtaining suitable equipment to cut the grass and as one of our future concerns is to keep the oval cut and so available for use, The Committee has decided to purchase a gang mower and hire a tractor as it is required. To assist in this purchase we are making a special appeal for funds. Provided we obtain a subsidy, which is expected, a donation of 4/6d. per family would cover the initial outlay of the mower. This will ensure that the children will receive the benefit of the considerable amount of work already expended in the preparation of this oval.

W.R. BURROW.

(Chairman of Risdon Park
School Committee).

And in 1957:

23 Eucalyptus torquata trees
were planted on the western
boundary.

Bill Brocklebank who lived opposite the school was a consistent enthusiast in the development of the garden environment of the school. Many people agree that his inspiration and

tireless labours were largely responsible for the wonderful school grounds which were developed.

On September 28 1957:

Today the first of a series of working bees was held to plant the oval area with couch grass. Many children as well as adults came from 9.00 am to 11.00 am. Doug



Adams was the main organiser - he ran every working bee.

In the following year (1958) through the efforts of the Committee in making personal contacts, 50 men turned up to a working bee. They started work at 7.30 am and put down a full cricket pitch and two half pitches on the school oval.

And thus, year by year, the grounds of Risdon Primary School blossomed into a cool green oasis in a hot dusty town. Visitors were often surprised to realise that the buildings, nestling in this leafy environment were all pre-fabricated - all that is except the toilet blocks!

Meantime the Welfare Club and the School Committee were continuing their stalwart work to improve other amenities for the children and teachers. From the provision, in 1955, of

Two 44-gallon drums for use as a furnace and a brake drum for a bell

by the 1960's water coolers and fans had been installed and the school was even considering the building of a swimming pool. (The idea was later abandoned.)

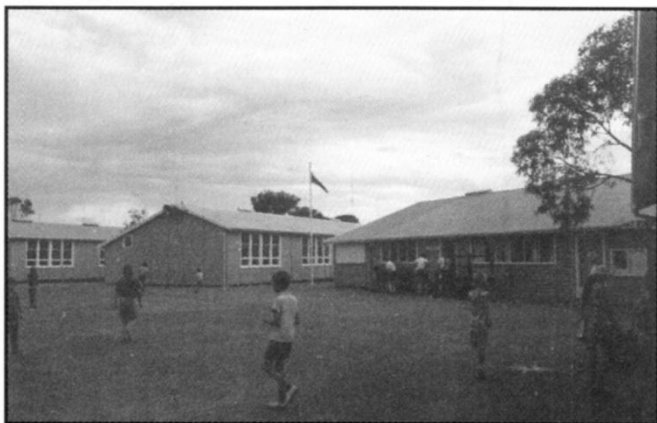
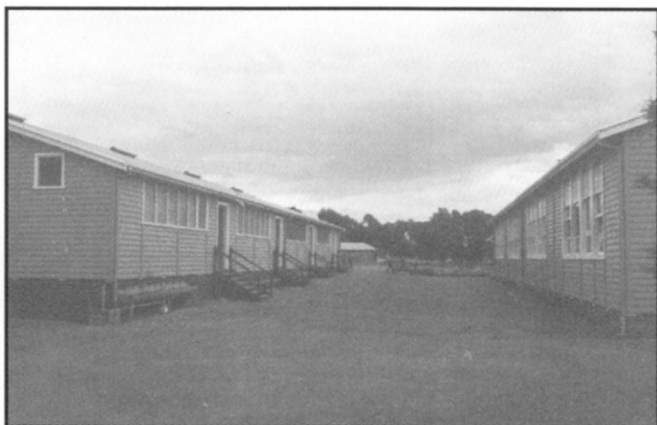
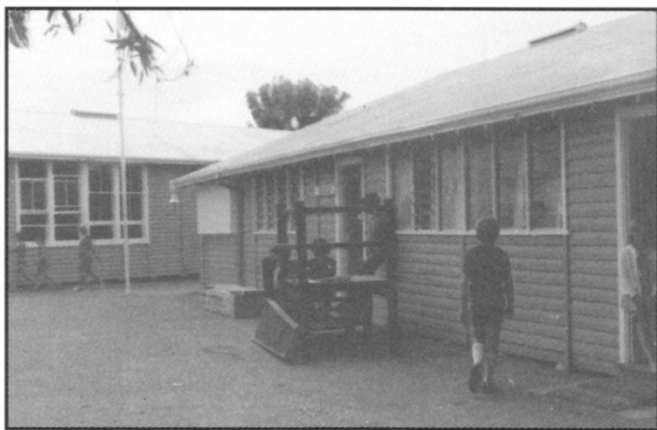
The provision of playground equipment in the schoolyard was undertaken by the School Committee in the first few years of the school's operation. This 'outside work' was once again clearly identified as the fathers' responsibility. Since the Broken Hill Associated Smelters was the town's largest employer, many of the committee members were its employees. This was seen as a definite advantage for the school because 'The Smelters' was well-known for its philanthropic works around the town. The public children's playgrounds in

Port Pirie were established by the BHAS, and many items of playground equipment in schoolyards were said to have been made at the Smelters, officially or unofficially! There are some definite advantages for people living in a company town.

Swings, monkey bars and a see-saw appeared in the play area. It is interesting that people's awareness of the need for safety in children's play areas was at a low level at that time. In the 60's a child was injured by collecting a huge splinter in her nether regions - from a see-saw. It required a local anaesthetic for its removal and a stitch to repair the wound! Another child fell off a swing and fractured a bone in her elbow.

In succeeding years the purposes of play areas and safety issues have gained a higher profile and play equipment in the schoolyard has changed accordingly. Nowadays we recognise that the design of a play area can encourage a combination of creative play and physical activity. The 1995 re-developed play area in the schoolyard takes all these issues into account.

Enrolments continued to climb reaching 795 by June 1965. The Infant Section (Junior Primary) had 270 children but the Education Department would not agree to form a separate Infant Department with an Infant Mistress in charge. More transportable rooms had been added to the school but there was still no sign of a new school of solid construction. The headmaster, Mr Lange, raised this as a matter of high priority with the Minister of Education Mr Loveday, and the Director-General of Education Mr Mander-Jones when they visited the school on 3 June 1965.



The following year the problem of over-population was relieved when Airdale Primary School opened and 156 children from Risdon Primary School transferred there. When Mr Don Smith became headmaster in May 1967, the school's enrolment was 586.

1974 and - at last! - work on the new Risdon Park Primary School began. It was not an auspicious beginning because, true to tradition, at the beginning of the school year, it teemed

RISDON PARK SCHOOL

SECOND ANNUAL

Sports Day

APRIL 15th, 1959

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COMPLIMENTARY TICKET AND PROGRAMME
ONE SHILLING

with rain and the school yard became a quagmire. With demolition in progress, it was very difficult to move between buildings. As the week went

\$600,000

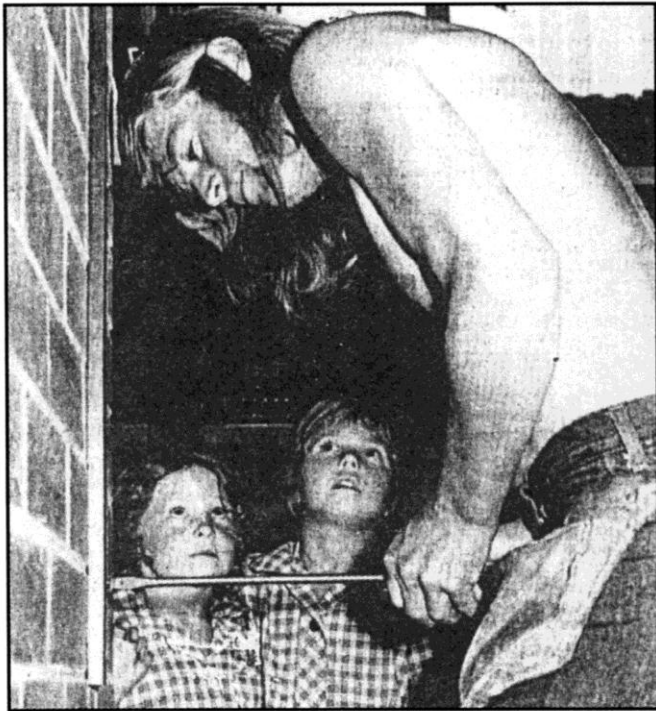
Oct. 6, 1972

RISDON SCHOOL

A proposal to spend about \$600,000 replacing the timber framed classrooms at Risdon Park Primary School is likely to be referred to the Public Works Standing Committee.

The Member for Pirie, Mr D. H. McKee in announcing this yesterday said the Minister of Education, Mr Hugh Hudson had agreed that present accommodation at Risdon Park was inadequate for modern teaching methods.

Cabinet has given its approval for an investigation by the committee. However, the proposal awaits formal approval by Executive Council because of the sum of money involved.

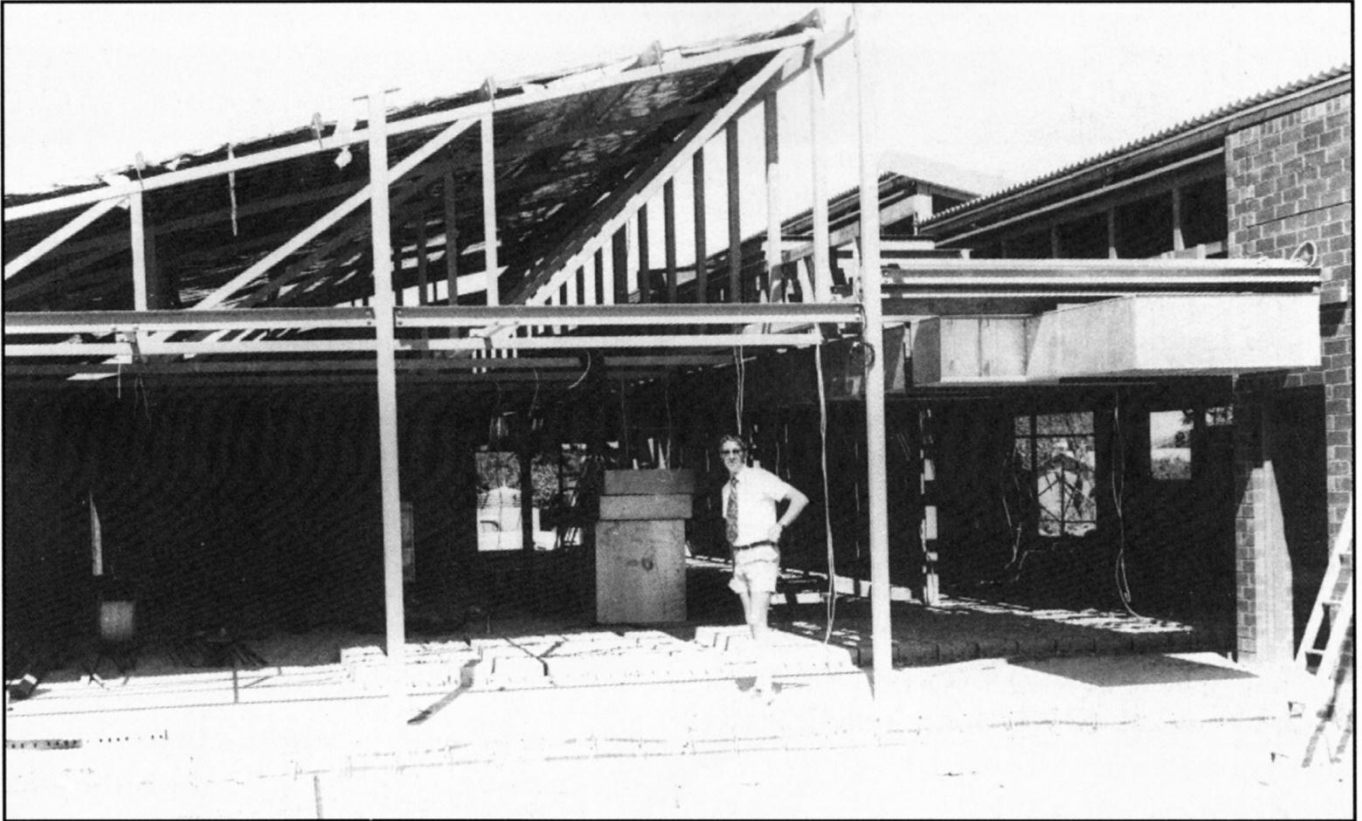


on the noise level increased as site works were prepared for the new solid construction buildings. The headmaster, Mr Chris Barratt, briefly mentions a minor drama on February 14. The administration building was being re-located by low-loader when the vehicle almost overturned in the mud. The building almost slipped off. Pity the poor headmaster at this time. Imaging trying to keep the school functioning and the children safe with all that building activity going on! One cheering note for the long-suffering Chris Barratt, during a heatwave at the

end of October he learnt that the new administration building was to have individual air-conditioning units. Hurrah!

Building of the school continued into 1975 with dust creating a 'real menace'. At last 4 classes moved into the Middle Primary Unit in April, and in July the Administration Area and Lower Primary





Unit were occupied. The Resource Centre and Upper Primary Unit came into use in August thus completing the occupation of the new school. As our student researchers state:

...the Risdon Park Primary wooden classroom doors closed on the echoes of 20 years of faithful service to the girls and boys of Port Pirie.

There were still jobs to be done in the new school and heavy rain in September revealed a number of leaks in the beautiful new buildings. How rain seems to have dogged significant events in the school's history!

With the re-planting of lawns and shrubs in 1976, the new school which the school community had been seeking for 20 years was indeed complete and ready to face the future.

Risdon turns 30

"It was very dry and dusty but I don't remember much else," she said.

"I remember the canvas water bags and that we were sent home early when it got too hot to continue."

Mrs Benn said busy bees were held by the children to plant trees all around the school and she remembered having to dig bones out of the soil to plant them.

"I think the site was previously a soap factory or something," she said.

Mrs Benn, with the help of Mr Middleton, planted a tree in the school grounds on June 18, 1976 which was the day the new school buildings were opened and was also during Port Pirie's centenary year.

She now sends her two sons Richard, 11, and Jason, 10 to the school because it is the closest to her home.