The selector’s hut at Camp Mountain

A report on its conservation, repair and maintenance, for the Institute for Sustainable Resources, Queensland University of Technology

Peter Marquis-Kyle conservation architect
www.marquis-kyle.com.au
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This report concerns a small hut at Camp Mountain near Samford on the outskirts of Brisbane. It was hand-built of local timber in about 1869. It has been altered since then, but it still exemplifies the kind of rudimentary houses many of the first European settlers lived in. The hut is entered in the Queensland Heritage Register, in recognition of its cultural heritage significance.

This report was commissioned by the Institute for Sustainable Resources, Queensland University of Technology, to guide the care of the hut.

History

The history of the hut has been investigated by a former owner, the late Dr Elizabeth Marks; by a research librarian, Leith Barter; and by staff of the Cultural Heritage Branch, Environmental Protection Agency. Their accounts differ in small ways, but all of these authors agree on the essential points, and I have drawn on their work in the summary below.

Squatters

During the first phase of European settlement in rural Queensland, squatters occupied large areas of Crown land for sheep and cattle raising. Later on, the government surveyed these squatting runs and insisted on lease conditions with the squatters. The Camp Mountain area is within the Samford pastoral run, first occupied in the 1850s and surrendered in the 1870s.

Selectors

The pastoral phase did not last long in the Samford area. In the 1860s the government moved to encourage small scale farming. The government resumed parts of the leasehold runs, which it sold or leased in small parcels to farmers — a process called selection. The heritage register entry continues the story— Closer settlement commenced from March 1865 with
the first sale of 49 farm allotments excised from the Samford Run. Initially, the farm allotments sold very slowly but the process accelerated after the passing of the 1868 [Crown Lands Alienation] Act. By 1871, there were about 71 people living in the area. The farmers grew small crops and operated dairies. A provisional school opened in 1872.

**George Atthow**

Grazier and entrepreneur, George Atthow (1828-1891), selected portions 42 to 45 in the Parish of Samford on 17 April 1869. It is likely that he built the extant cottage and some nearby cattle yards soon after. ... Atthow grazed cattle on the property and on other land he later selected in the Samford and Albany Creek areas. A bailiff was living on the Samford block from January 1870. By 1875, Atthow himself was living there.

A government official inspected Atthow’s selection in 1875 and recorded that he saw a slab house, shingle roof, verandah in front, 2 rooms, and made a sketch plan showing this house in the same location as the present building.⁵

**Subsequent owners**

In 1877 George Atthow sold the four portions to John Coe. Ownership passed to Frederick George Coe in 1880, to Andrew Gordon in 1884, and to Dr Charles F Marks in 1887. Marks called the property *Cushleva Farm*.⁶ Much of it remained in Marks family ownership, through a complicated series of transfers among family members of various parcels which I won’t record here, until fairly recently.

Keighly Marks and Espie Dods at the hut, apparently during renovations, c1887. [Scanned from a copy print provided by Dr Elizabeth Marks, 1998].

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**The Marks family at Cushleva**

George Atthow’s slab hut was occupied by Dr E G Keighly Marks, Charles F Marks’s younger brother, who wanted to try combining a country practice with farming.⁷ A photograph, which Elizabeth Marks believed was taken soon after the purchase of the land in 1887, shows...
Keighly Marks and J Espie Dods (C F Marks’s step-son, then in his teens) in front of the house.8

The photo shows the house in a different state from that described in the 1875 report. The split timber roof shingles have been replaced with corrugated iron, and the gable cladding, barge boards, and the wall sheeting of two rooms enclosing the two ends of the verandah, are all of sawn boards. A window opening in one of the new walls has no window sashes or shutters, and various boards and tools are propped against the house, suggesting that the refurbishments were not complete at the time the photo was taken.

Keighly Marks lived in the house, practising medicine and grazing cattle, until around 1894. After that the house was let to a succession of tenants. Between about 1924 and 1942 George Harvey, an employee of Charles Marks, lived in the house with his wife and four children. The last time anyone lived in the house was in around 1944, when Walter Strohmeier, a fencer, lived there for a year or so. Afterwards the house stood empty and its gradual deterioration was hastened by horses and cattle that got into it.9

The selector’s hut in 2008.

Repairs

Members of the Marks family continued to maintain the house, even though it was not occupied. In her 1984 article Elizabeth Marks mentions replacement posts organised by Ted Marks some time before 1975, and describes more extensive work during the summer of 1975-76 when the house was repaired, using slabs donated by Chas Marks from the old horse stalls at the granite quarry, and from a collapsed hut, thought to have been built by John Hart, near the Kupidabin dairy. She describes the two types of slabs introduced—the hut slabs are broad and well shaped, those from the stables narrower and rough. Some time later a fence was built around the house to keep stock away, and an old riveted iron ship’s tank, similar to ones visible in an 1887 photo, was moved from the old granite quarry and placed next to the hut.10
Dr Elizabeth Marks’s bequest

Elizabeth Marks inherited part of the Cushleva property, including the portion on which the selector’s hut stands, when her father died in 1971. She moved to the property and lived in the old barracks after the family houses on Wickham Terrace were sold in about 1982.

Elizabeth (who was called Patricia by her friends and family) died in 2002. The executors of her estate, in accordance with her will, have made the remaining 55 hectares of Cushleva Farm available for use as an ecological research facility by the Institute for Sustainable Resources, part of the Queensland University of Technology. Management and conservation of the hut is the responsibility of the university.

Dating the fabric

The hut has reached its present form through a series of additions and subtractions. In the following paragraphs I’ll set out a summary of the history of each part of the fabric—this is based on a brief investigation, and I believe it is sufficient for the present purpose. Closer investigation is likely to provide better information.

The hut

The hut was originally built around 1869, probably with a main room under a gable roof, with an attached skillion room to the south-west and a verandah to the north-east. Around 1887 it was refurbished, with a new corrugated iron roof, and timber boarded walls. It was extensively repaired in the 1970s.

Floor — The incomplete remnants of a timber floor, of boards fixed to joists laid on the ground, may have been introduced during the 1887 refurbishment. The earlier dirt floor probably remains beneath.
» **Walls** — Some original 1869 split slabs and hewn plates probably remain in the walls, some moved from their original positions. The sawn timber linings on the south-west wall, and the horizontal boards on the gables, probably date from 1887. Some new replacement posts were introduced in the 1970s, along with old slabs removed from two other old buildings on other parts of the Marks family land.

» **Roof** — The corrugated iron roof sheeting probably dates from 1887 and is supported on a mix of machine-sawn rafters (probably installed 1887) and hewn rafters (perhaps reused from the earlier shingle roof). Close inspection of these hewn rafters might find evidence of closely spaced shingle battens.

Missing elements:

» **Shingle roof** — Nothing remains of the 1869 roof covering of split timber shingles, though some of the old rafters may have been re-used as noted above.

» **South-west skillion** — The skillion room (a kitchen?) visible in the 1887 photo has been completely removed, though there may be some below-ground evidence of it.

» **Fireplaces** — The pair of timber slab-built chimneys visible in the 1887 photo have been removed, though some evidence of them may survive below the ground.

The reputed cool storage pit, partly filled with old corrugated iron and other refuse.

The fence and tank

The fence, erected to protect the hut from wandering stock, was put up some time after the mid 1970s. The square iron tank, of a type known in the 19th century as a *ship’s tank*, was moved from the old granite quarry in 1979.11
The pit
To the north of the hut, about 10m away, is a pit which is reputed to have been used as a cool store for milk. The date of this structure is unknown.

The stock yards
The stock yards and loading ramp, built of round timber posts and sawn timber rails, date from the 1950s or later.

The setting
The hut sits on a slight ridge in a paddock of generally open pasture dotted with a few isolated trees, close to the south-west boundary of the property.

» The open character of the landscape probably dates from the initial clearing of trees to create pasture for grazing in the 1860s.

» The isolated trees are probably natural (self-sown) regrowth since the 1950s.

» The large clump of Duranta and isolated Oleander bushes are probably domestic plantings, perhaps from the nineteenth century.

Significance
I agree with the heritage council’s assessment of the cultural significance of the site, which I quote below, with my comments added.

Demonstrating the pattern of history
*The Former Selector’s Hut, Camp Mountain, built in circa 1870 or earlier, illustrates an important phase of settlement that was occurring throughout the colony of Queensland at the time. From the 1860s, Crown land began to be divided into allotments and made available for selection in line with a government policy to encourage the growth of small scale farming. The Camp Mountain hut was built by a selector during the early stages of this process in the Samford Valley.*
These values are represented by various layers of the fabric, including the character of the cleared pastoral landscape, the 1860s hut and its 1887 renovations, and the signs of subsequent deterioration and repair.

The storage pit and stockyards are important evidence of farming activities associated with the changing uses of the hut, the property and land use in the Samford since 1870.

In addition, the storage pit (now filled with discarded material) has some value because of its potential to reveal further information through archaeological methods.

Surveyor’s plan of the area included in the Queensland Heritage Register. I believe that the reference to a lease is incorrect—the pegged area is not a separate lease, but simply identifies the area that is subject to the Queensland Heritage Act 1992.

Rarity

The hut is a rare example of a 19th century selector’s dwelling and a good example of a slab hut. It is uncommon in southeast Queensland for its earliness. Its austerity, modest scale and construction techniques are important in demonstrating a way of life and a building type once common but now rare.

A good example of a selector’s dwelling

The hut is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a selector’s timber slab dwelling of the 19th century. The design and construction techniques reflect the limited resources available when constructing a dwelling on a selected block during the initial stages of closer settlement. The hut is small in scale and simple in design. Timber elements
are set directly into the ground and the hut is mostly clad with hardwood timber slabs.

Also, it is typical for slab huts to be adapted, either to improve amenity (as here) or for re-use for storage or animal housing.

**Aesthetic value**

*Sited on a gentle ridge, surrounded by lightly wooded pasture with the backdrop of rolling hills including the D’Aguilar Range, the humble slab hut in its picturesque setting evokes the sensibilities of a rustic idyll. Modern elements are minimised in many of the important view lines, and this is effective in conveying a sense of the early form and setting of the hut.*

The interior of the hut, showing the various layers of its construction—the hewn wall plates and some of the slabs probably date from the 1860s; the remnants of floor boards, the sawn lining boards, parts of the roof framing, and the corrugated iron roof sheeting date from the 1880s; newspapers glued to the walls date from the early 20th century; some posts and exterior wall slabs (re-used from other old buildings) were introduced in the 1970s.

**Conservation recommendations**

I make the following recommendations concerning the use, management and care of the site. These recommendations are all based on the culturally significant attributes of the place.

**Conservation process**

The best professional practice in conservation should be brought to bear in using and caring for the selector’s hut. The need for this is well summarised in the Burra Charter:

> Places of cultural significance enrich people’s lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences. They are historical records, that are important as tangible expressions of Australian identity and experience. Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and the past that has formed us and the Australian landscape. They are irreplaceable and precious.
These places of cultural significance must be conserved for present and future generations.12

The Burra Charter sets out the principles of a sound approach to conserving places like the selector’s hut, and is the accepted standard.

Recommendation 1  *The selector’s hut and its setting should be conserved in accordance with the Burra Charter*—[important].

The charter points out the importance of using all the knowledge, skills and disciplines that can contribute to the study and care of places like the selector’s hut. Relevant professional skills are available from these people:

» Architects in the Cultural Heritage Branch, Environmental Protection Agency.

» Private consultants in various conservation disciplines.

Recommendation 2  *Use and conservation of the selector’s hut should be guided by people skilled and experienced in conserving historic buildings and places*—[important].

The advice in this report takes account of current circumstances as I understand them, and is meant to guide the future care of the building. But circumstances may change, and the recommendations will need to be reviewed from time to time.

Recommendation 3  *This report should be considered and adopted by the custodians of the site*—[important].

Recommendation 4  *Once adopted, a copy of this report should be submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency as a record of conservation policy for the site*—[important, not urgent].

Recommendation 5  *This plan should be reviewed within five years of its adoption, revised if necessary, and adopted for a further period*—[important, not urgent].

**Use**

I understand the former Marks property is to be used for purposes of ecological research and teaching by the Institute for Sustainable Resources. The care and conservation of the selector’s hut and its setting can be managed in ways that are consistent with that purpose and with the proper custodianship of its cultural values.

The hut and its setting provides educational opportunities for students in various disciplines at the university.

Recommendation 6  *An information kit should be prepared, to brief people before they come to the site about its significance and appropriate protocols for using it.*  This
could take the form of a small printed document also available as a PDF file, or a short downloadable video—[important, urgent].

Recommendation 7 An education plan should be developed, to integrate opportunities for research and teaching within the university courses, consistent with the best conservation for the site—[fairly important, not urgent].

Recommendation 8 All studies, investigations and surveys of the hut should be collected in an archive and made available to subsequent researchers—[fairly important, not urgent].

Recommendation 9 A program of archaeological research on the site should be established, perhaps in collaboration with the University of Queensland or other institutions with research and teaching programs in archaeology—[fairly important, not urgent].

The selector’s hut, with its delicate layers of historical evidence, is a valuable resource for teaching the skills of investigating, recording and analysing structures. Students of architecture, engineering, surveying, and other disciplines, can benefit from projects here.

Repairs

Recommendation 10 Refix door hinges and latch, or install new supplementary hardware to ensure the door is operable and can be latched closed—[important, urgent].

Recommendation 11 Fit new packing under loose floor boards, or erect removable barricades, to prevent damage by people walking inside the hut—[important, urgent].

Recommendation 12 Engage a carpenter/joiner experienced in conservation work to secure loose gable boards, using galvanised screws, wire or strapping applied in a reversible manner, and fit removable exterior galvanised steel external covers to protect the boards from weather—[important, urgent].

Recommendation 13 Engage a carpenter/joiner experienced in conservation work to secure loose timber slabs and iron roof sheeting, using galvanised screws, wire or strapping applied in a reversible manner—[important, urgent].
Recommendation 14  *Investigate options for the long-term stabilisation of the structure by means of reversible props, braces or stays, to provide for the continuing deterioration of the timber posts and forestall collapse*—[important, medium term].

**Managing risks**

Recommendation 15  *Keep stray animals away from the hut by keeping the door and gate closed*—[important, ongoing].

Recommendation 16  *Periodically cut and remove the grass and other vegetation around the hut, yards and fences to reduce the fire hazard*—[important, at intervals appropriate to fuel and fire risk].

Recommendation 17  *Engage a qualified operator to install termite baiting stations in the ground around the hut and yards, to regularly monitor them for the presence of termites, and to apply poisoned baits in the stations as required*—[important, at appropriate intervals (already done)].

Recommendation 18  *Periodically inspect the hut and its setting to monitor changes in condition*—[important, at quarterly intervals].

**Landscape conservation**

Recommendation 19  *Manage the vegetation around the hut to maintain the visual character of the setting as an area cleared for grazing*—[important, medium term].

Recommendation 20  *Retain at least parts of the existing plantings of Oleander and Duranta*—[important, medium term].

Recommendation 21  *Do not visually accentuate the boundaries of the heritage listed area*—[important, medium term].
Notes


2. Leith Barter (Local Studies Librarian, Pine Rivers Shire Council), The history and heritage significance of the pioneer hut, Camp Mountain: Parish of Samford; a discussion paper (PDF document, 15 February 2007).

3. The EPA research findings are summarised in the Entry in the Queensland Heritage Register accepted by the Queensland Heritage Council in 2007. The register entry is available on the web at http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/chims/placeDetail.html?siteId=29110.


5. Leith Barter, The history and heritage significance of the pioneer hut...

6. Cushleva is an Irish placename, signifying a place at the foot of a mountain.


8. Elizabeth Marks gave me a copy print of this photo in 1998, which I have scanned for use in this report. On the back of the print she had written: in C F Marks’ hand on print from which this is copied: “Cushleva” Keoghly & Espie and along left margin “Mount Daniel” Almost certainly 1887, the year in which the property was bought from G Atthow.


10. There are at least two Marks family photographs of the hut, c1887—the one reproduced in Samford reminiscences and the one reproduced in this report. The former shows ship’s tanks, but does not show Espie Dods.

11. [Dr] Elizabeth N Marks, “The slab cottage at Camp Mountain”, p 27.