



Q STATION

# QUARANTINE CURIOSITIES SELF-GUIDED TOUR

A self-guided walking tour discovering the rich history of the Quarantine Station site.

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  [qstation](#)

# Q STATION

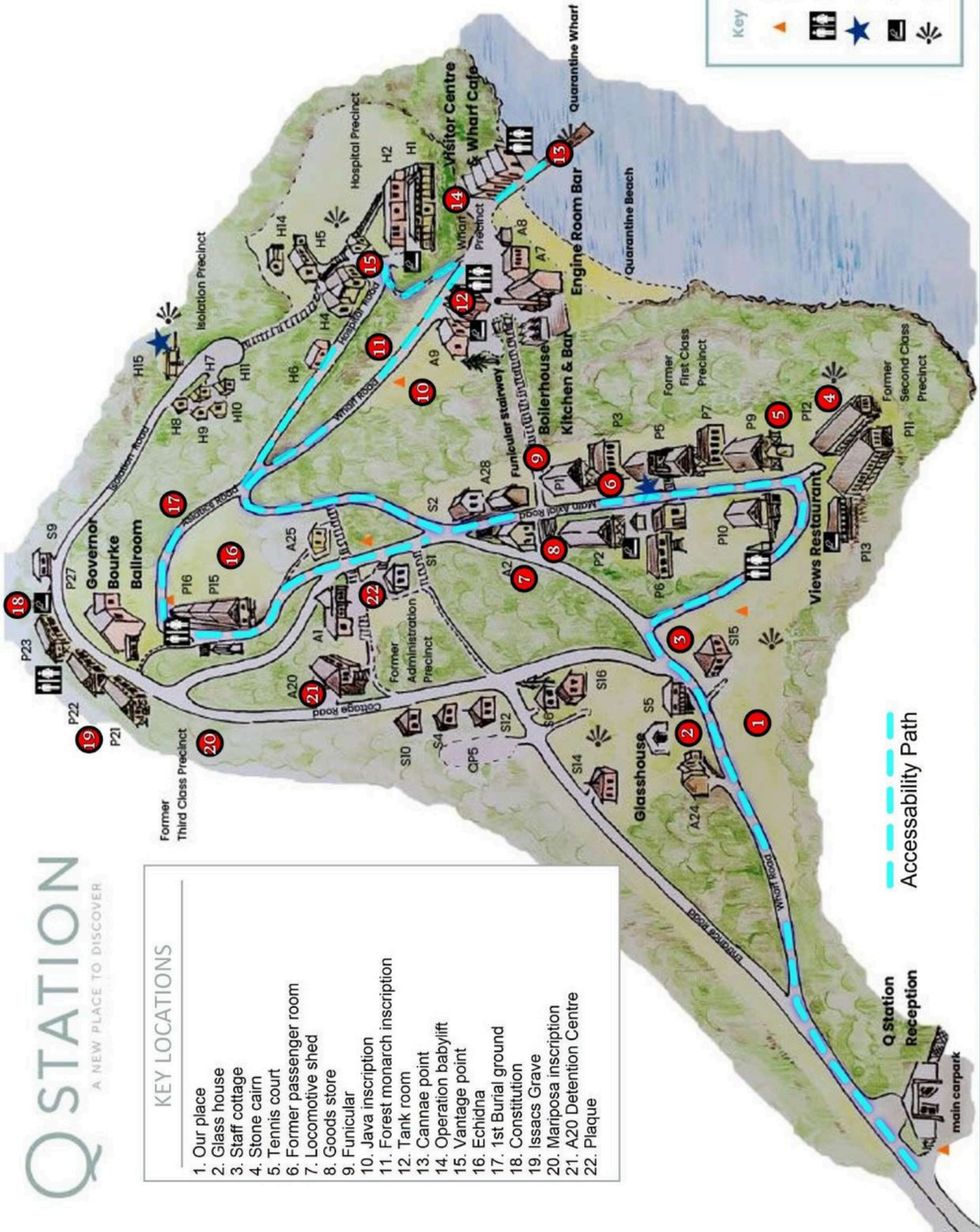
A NEW PLACE TO DISCOVER

## KEY LOCATIONS

1. Our place
2. Glasshouse
3. Staff cottage
4. Stone cairn
5. Tennis court
6. Former passenger room
7. Locomotive shed
8. Goods store
9. Funicular
10. Java inscription
11. Forest monarch inscription
12. Tank room
13. Cannae point
14. Operation babylift
15. Vantage point
16. Echidna
17. 1st Burial ground
18. Constitution
19. Issacs Grave
20. Mariposa inscription
21. A20 Detention Centre
22. Plaque

## Key

- Emergency muster points
- Toilets
- Guest lounges
- Smoking areas
- Viewpoints



Accessibility Path

Q Station Reception

main carpark

## Q Station Acknowledgement

We stand today on this land, now known as North Head. It is Car-rang gel / Garangal, saltwater country. May we always be respectful of the knowledge borne of the Aboriginal custodianship of this land and the continuing connection to the land, waters, and sky. We honour the presence of the ancestors who reside in the living memory and practice of this land and pay our respects to their Elders – past, present and emerging.

### Welcome To Our Place **Location 1**

Standing in the shade of these gnarled paperbark trees you can look out over the impressive vista of Sydney Harbour. The rocky coast and sandy beaches of these northern reaches tell the story of the earliest contact between local Aboriginal communities and Captain Phillip and the colonialists of the 1788 First Fleet. The colonialists written and recorded narrative of this area gives one historical perspective. The oral storytelling, dance and cultural practices of those that lived in this area are harder to untangle. Despite this Car-reng-gal or North Head remains a place of significance from an Aboriginal perspective.

Rich in a diverse ecology, Sydney Harbour National Park is home to endangered populations of both flora and fauna. The majestic Camfield's Stringybark trees, glorious Sunshine Wattle, Eastern Long Nosed Bandicoot and shy Little Penguins are all recognised as endangered populations here on North Head. During your walk today keep a lookout for these species. You may also see an Echidna sauntering along the roadside or hear a yellow tailed Black Cockatoo screeching as it flies overhead.

### The Glasshouse **Location 2**

Built environment on this site has changed considerably since the first buildings were erected in 1837. This glasshouse is a distinctive element in the landscape and is one of the most recently added. It first appeared on a site map in 1964, but is thought to have been built in 1957. John Roberts lived at the Station with his family for the first 14 years of his life from 1950 to 1965. He recalls the Glass house being built by Bryan Lavering, a former Quarantine Station staff member who used to grow orchids in it. After the station was taken over by NPWS in 1984 the Greenhouse was operated under license by a private horticulturalist. It appears that NPWS repaired the building, added shade house and provided benching within the structure.

## S5 Staff Cottage (G&T House) Location 3

In February 1945, the MacMahon family – Frank, his wife Lila, Patricia, Denise and John – moved to the Quarantine Station (or the “Quaro” as it was known) The Quaro was their home for the next 12 years, first in S5 then in the adjacent staff cottage S16. Frank worked initially as a Quarantine Assistant doing general labour work and then worked his way to become Storekeeper before he left the Quarantine Station in 1957. Wages were low, so the family had to work hard and be inventive to supplement their means. Growing vegetables, keeping chickens, collecting firewood and bottles from the beach to be sold were all part of life. During the time they lived at the station there were very few quarantines, so they had the freedom of the site to fish, enjoy picnics at the beach whilst swimming and boating. The largest quarantine during this time was of the Mooltan in 1949.



## Stone Cairn Location 4

This stone cairn is the oldest surviving colonial-built structure on site. After the disastrous voyage and subsequent quarantine of the Lady McNaghten in 1837 in which a total of 73 passengers and crew died, Governor Bourke requested funds for the establishment of a permanent Quarantine Station on the site at North Head.

The Legislative Council agreed and Returns of the Colony in 1837 show that 1774 pounds sterling was allocated for “Buildings and Enclosures at North Head of Port Jackson for the purpose of Quarantine.”

By May 1838 The station's boundary line was delineated by either twelve or thirteen cairn shaped boundary pillars, each about eight feet high, built with stones bonded with lime mortar and lime-washed for clear visibility, including the one that remains standing in this spot The boundaries were patrolled day and night by a military guard, for whom sentry boxes were erected in 1849.

The guard, was encamped near Store Beach, and usually consisted of one Sargeant (paid 2s. per day) and up to 9 privates (each paid 1s per day). From about 1860, guard duties were taken over by the Sydney Police Force, who were billeted in quarters outside the boundary lines.



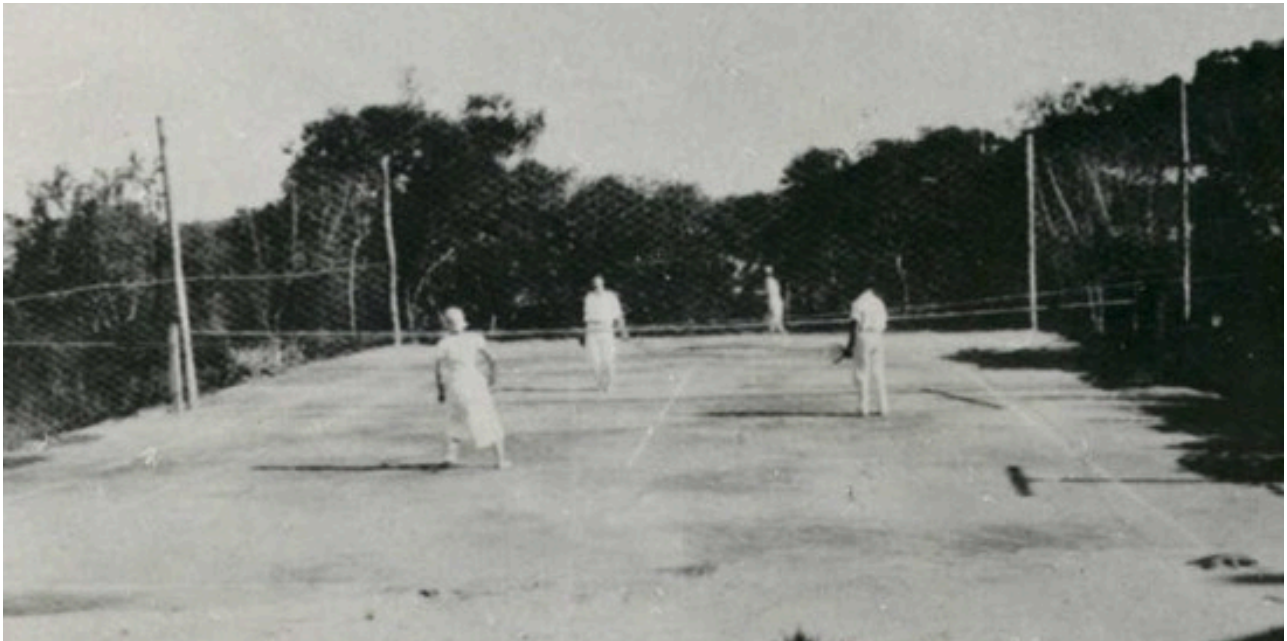
## Tennis Courts [Location 5](#)

There were many factors which shaped the experience for those that were quarantined at North Head Quarantine Station; the period of history, the class of ticket on board the ship they arrived on, the circumstance of the quarantine, the infectious disease, the number of passengers suffering from that disease, even the weather played a part in the experience. An article in the Sydney Morning Herald from 1913 described some of the leisure pursuits that passengers took part in whilst they were waiting to be released from quarantine.

By 1929 these pursuits also included tennis for the first-class passengers. This level grassed area in front of P9 is clearly visible in photos taken of the site in 1929 and shows a tennis court. Memories of passengers playing tennis are also recorded in Quarantine Station oral histories of the time.



Those who are merely detained as contacts have about 500 acres of ground to ramble over. In good weather the days pass like a picnic. There are retired paths and retreats and open well-grassed plots. Cricket has been played, and though the inclines are steep football has been attempted. Fishing is open to all, and those who like swimming have opportunities in abundance.



## PI Passenger Room [Location 6](#)

Today most of the buildings either side of the Main Axial Road are purposed for our visitor's hotel accommodation. However, one room in Building PI is a window to the past. By the 1960s the numbers of passengers to be quarantined reduced because of the development of airline travel. Quarantine was generally only for those who arrived in Australia without the correct vaccination certificates. Press the button to light up this room so that you can see inside a former passenger room of the 1960s.

## Locomotive Shed, Goods Store & Funicular [Locations 7,8,9](#)

One of the challenges of such a large site was solved with the construction of a narrow gauge track system in 1914. Connecting the wharf precinct to the main accommodation and administrative areas, this railway was key in the distribution of passenger luggage and other goods on site.

On the upper levels a small locomotive ran from the top of the funicular to the third class precinct. It was housed in the locomotive shed, adjacent to which you can still see the fuel tank. (7) The rail tracks ran past A2 which was the main goods and linen store room. Above the main doorway you can see the remnants of the pulley system where goods would be offloaded. (8) below A2 the tracks descended sharply into the wharf precinct. Goods were hauled up this slope by funicular. Today the route provides access into the Wharf Precinct for our visitors via a stairway (9).



## Inscriptions

Providing another window to the past are the inscriptions on the sandstone rockfaces within the wharf precinct. Over 1600 inscriptions have been recorded across the site including the inaccessible cliff top area at Old Man's Hat. All were carved by those who spent time in quarantine offering tantalizing words from the creators own individual perspective of the quarantine experience. Names of ships, passengers and crew, dates, diseases and symbols. These key facts serve as a record; the choice of information included by the creator is the beginning of our own journey in trying to reveal the greater story of each inscription, before time and the elements degrade them further. In this tour we have chosen to highlight only two. One of the earliest easily visible is the Forest Monarch inscription whilst the SS Java carving tells the history of the site from a differing cultural perspective.

### Java Inscription [Location 10](#)

SS Java arrived at Quarantine Station on June 6, 1880, because of 1 case of smallpox. It was quarantined at the Station for 64 days, when most vessels were detained for not more than 3 weeks. Of all the ships quarantined from 1837-1881, only one other ship was quarantined for longer, the William Rodger, with 45 deaths recorded. No deaths were associated with the quarantine of SS Java, so what was the reason behind this 2nd longest quarantine? The answer lies in the latter part of the inscription itself written neatly in Dutch, "299 Chineesche passagiers, 12 Juli 1880"

The link between smallpox and Asian origins, habits and morality, came to dominate Australian policy, from the SS Java onwards. During the smallpox epidemic of 1881, Chinese arrivals and residents were regularly blamed for the introduction and spread of the disease. Until public outrage stopped the practice, Chinese passengers arriving in Australia were subjected to being detained on ships for 21-days and permitted to land only after submitting their clothes and personal belongings to being burned.

By the end of 1881, the NSW Parliament enacted immigration restriction legislation that directly targeted the movement of Chinese into the colony. Through this approach, by 1901 Sydney was leading the way towards the 'White Australia' policy that dominated national politics lasting well into the 20th century.

## Forest Monarch inscription [Location 11](#)

From 1851 to 1862 the non-Aboriginal population of the Australian colonies more than doubled from 437 thousand to over 1 million. Many immigrants were driven by a desire for a better life in a new land. Daniel Yates, who created the Forest Monarch inscription may have been one such man. A stone mason by trade, he left Southampton with his wife, Mary Ann and children, Thomas aged 9, Sarah Ann aged 7, 2-year-old William and newly born Maria on the Forest Monarch as it headed on its 4-month journey to Australia.

By then the 341 immigrants on board had reduced to 330 and then a day after arriving at the Quarantine Station to 329 as Mary Anne died from weakness and scurvy. This followed another great sadness as young William was one of those that had died on the voyage. Daniel was now left a widower with 3 children to care for. This inscription Daniel created though bears no mention of his immediate family, choosing instead to inscribe the names of the surgeon super- intendent, captain and first mate of the voyage. There had been many difficulties on this particular journey.

Doctor Crane was responsible not only for treating the illnesses to which passengers succumbed but also oversaw the regular provision of rations to the passengers and was charged with guaranteeing their moral conduct. Deficiency of provisions was in part to blame for 'debilitas et scorbulus' which he recorded as the cause of Mary Anne's death. Was Daniel honouring or accusing these men of contributing to his wife and son's death? All we know is that in our moveable heritage store another inscription; a more personal memorial or headstone for his wife. Beautifully crafted piece simply inscribed M.A.Y 1858.





## Tank Room [Location 12](#)

In 1909 Dr W. P. Norris became the first Federal Director of Quarantine. After an extensive study tour of quarantine arrangements in 12 other countries he prepared his "Report on Quarantine in other countries and on the Quarantine Requirements of Australia" which was tabled before Parliament in March 1912. This report dispelled any reservations about expensive quarantine stations in Australia as Norris reported that the plague and yellow fever were pandemic around the world and smallpox endemic, and Australia unquestionably one of the worst protected counties in the world with regard to personal vaccination. His recommendations for improvements to 12 major and minor quarantine establishments around Australia was accepted.

Subsequently a huge building program began at North Head Quarantine Station to improve the process and living quarters for quarantined passengers. These large tanks were part of the disinfection system installed at this time. Tanks here and in the room above feed the pipes which flow into the passengers bathing blocks either side. Phenol was added to water to create a carbolic acid solution which was effective in erasing the fleas and body lice which can host infectious disease.

## Cannae Point [Location 13](#)

The Surgeon Superintendent or medical officer on board a ship entering Sydney Harbour had to make a written declaration as to whether there was any sickness on board ship.

If all passengers were healthy and no sickness had been determined on the ship then it sailed to Circular Quay for passengers to offload. It was therefore only ships where an infectious disease had been determined that came to the Quarantine Station. This meant that there were periods of time when there was no active quarantine taking place on site. Whenever an active quarantine was in play, this was signaled to the local community by the flying of the yellow quarantine flag. A flagpole was first erected on this site in the 1830s. Subsequent flagpoles have been built here. In the 1980s the existing flagpole was restored and riggered.



# Quarantine As A Refuge

## Operation Babylift [Location 14](#)

In the final stages of the Vietnam War, the Quarantine Station provided refuge for children who were hastily evacuated from Saigon as it fell. Gough Whitlam was instrumental in advocating for state premiers to remove adoption and migration barriers to play a part in the largest humanitarian evacuation ever. Over 200 children were brought to Australia and initially many of them found themselves in the care of staff at the Quarantine Station whilst they waited to be met by their new adoptive families.

## A Safe Haven [Location 15](#)

This vantage point gives impressive views across beautiful Sydney Harbour. On occasion it has also been possible to view southern right and humpback whales from this point if they enter the harbour as part of their annual migration from May through to November.

## Echidna (in latin *tachyglossus aculeatus*) [Location 16](#)

Our site is refuge to a number of short beaked echidnas and this grassy slope is a preferred spot for them as they scratch and dig in the loose soil for their favourite food- ants and termites. Echidnas are one of only two of the world's monotremes or egg laying mammals. Although echidnas are well distributed across Australia they are not widely seen because of their quiet and reclusive nature. The latin name for an echidna is perfectly in sync with its characteristics; *tachyglossus* means quick tongue and *aculeatus* means spiny or equipped with spines.

## 1st Burial Ground [Location 17](#)

The Quarantine Station on North Head was ultimately a success story in the control of infectious disease through the population of Sydney and beyond. However, that success came at a cost to the many individuals who lost their lives here from diseases such as smallpox, plague and Spanish influenza. 572 people are known to be buried mostly across 3 Quarantine burial grounds. The first known burial of a quarantined person occurred 5 days after the arrival of the immigrant ship Canton in September 1835. Although North Head had been declared for use as a quarantine area prior to this arrival no consideration had been given to what should happen to those that died.

Consequently, one year old Isaac Hargreaves is now buried in the vicinity of Quarantine Beach in an unknown grave. Doctor Inches the Colonial Medical Officer had been sent to take charge of landing the passengers of the Lady MacNaghten in 1837 chose an area about midway up the slope from the beach behind the quarantine encampment. An estimated 228 people are buried in this area including 94 children under the age of 14 years. The painting shows this view in 1847. Changes to the built environment meant that in 1853 this burial ground was leveled, and headstones and grave markers were relocated to the Second burial ground which was situated behind the buildings which had been erected on healthy ground (now the site of P21,22,23). A final Third burial ground is located on land which now forms part of the Sydney Harbour Trust precinct on North Head.

## Constitution Monument [Location 18](#)

During his quarantine on North Head in 1855, Charles Moore an English Immigrant described this monument being built in his diary.

“Monday 25th [June] Another child died and buried. To gather four Masons have erected a very Nice Monument in Memory of those that died at Sea. It stands about eight feet high.”

Charles was travelling with his wife Louisa on the ship Constitution which sailed from Plymouth, England in Feb 1855, arriving in Sydney Harbour at the end of May. He kept a diary for the duration of the voyage and his quarantine, which has subsequently been published in the book, *Humin Hopes*, edited by Rob Wills.

In May 1905, 50 years after the release of the surviving passengers a plaque was added to the monument to commemorate the 27 lives lost from ship’s passengers during a picnic reunion of survivors and their descendants. This tradition continued in 2005, 150 years after the quarantine with another addition to the monument.

Picture below; Descendants in 1905, courtesy of Rob Wills; *Humin Hopes*.





## Issacs Grave Location 19

This seemingly solitary grave is part of the Second Burial ground in which a known 102 people are buried. Isaac Lowes was the 6-year-old son of Joseph and Frances, one of 13 children who died either on the voyage or during the subsequent quarantine of the Smyrna who travelled from Plymouth, UK in 1878.

Efforts to improve ventilation and hygiene on board the mid nineteenth century sailing ships, consisted of increasing ventilation, airing of bedding, insistence in the use of toilets, segregation of the sick and the provision of a doctor and a matron. Despite this, children often bore the brunt of any infectious disease outbreaks. The Smyrna was quarantined for outbreaks of numerous diseases, including measles, typhoid fever and scarlet fever.

## Mariposa Inscription Location 20

"STOP Let weary travellers listen as we tell the awful treatment that to us befell on the Mariposa many were our woes 'Tis a mercy we have not yet turned up our toes."



Surviving from the quarantine of the RMS Mariposa in 1888 it is unknown who carved this creative verse when the 80 or more passengers were quarantined here for 2-3 weeks in February of 1888. On the voyage from San Fransisco a 16 year old steerage passenger was found to be suffering from smallpox and was isolated from the rest of the passengers and crew. The ship's surgeon Dr Giberson then vaccinated all of the ship's crew and all but 14 of the passengers with the lymph vaccine. When the ship arrived in quarantine those that had not been vaccinated and those in whom the vaccine had not taken were required to undertake a 21 day quarantine. The majority however were released from quarantine after a fortnight. Was the creator of this inscription describing the vaccination process or the subsequent quarantine?

## A20 Detention Centre Location 21

Building A20 was first constructed in 1928 as a staff dining room, however its subsequent use tells another important story in Australian history. In the 1960s it was taken over by the Immigration Department. The Migration Act 1958 legalised the detention of "illegal immigrants", a term referring to anyone without a valid visa. The Quarantine Station played a role in the processing of this group of people, as they were detained in this building whilst awaiting deportation.

You can still see bars on some of the windows and the whole veranda was enclosed. Cathy Carr, a nurse at the Quarantine Station recalled her memories of the people in A20. “[in 1976] it was wired in; they’d be standing looking down at us, like monkeys in a cage” All of the inmates were male and their presence was not welcomed by many amongst North Head’s small community of staff and families. Complaints were made by staff about the untidiness of the yard outside the building, the whistling and cooing at female staff and residents and that “sometimes at night very offensive language can be heard all over the station.” A20 was home to many detainees whilst they awaited their fate, which was usually deportation.

Finding themselves bored or perhaps merely trying to express their thoughts whilst in this situation, the internees have left messages drawn and incised on the walls. Over one fifth of the almost 500 inscriptions located in this building are in languages other than English.

Life in a gaol is like a bird in a cage Yan F  
(translated from Chinese)

The Cruelty  
Where did you come from, Adam or Noah  
My wrists! How did you get this chain?  
The cruel capitalists can exploit and kill  
The poor people and enslave them  
I’m not strong enough!  
The cruel and the cruelty  
My wrists! How did I get this chain?  
(translated from Turkish)



## Plaque Location 22

Commemorating the end of the Quarantine Station’s operational period this plaque was unveiled in March 1984. As the longest continuously operating Quarantine Station in Australia the legacy of this site was the protection of our communities against infectious disease. However, with the improved medical technology of the twentieth century and air travel firmly established as the primary means of entering Australia, quarantine was to be managed without the use of the facility at North Head. The site was handed to the NSW government for use as a national park.

Tourism has been at the forefront of the most recent chapter of the Quarantine Station’s history. Today it remains a part of Sydney Harbour National Park. In addition, a lease arrangement is in place.

This first allowed the Mawland Group (2006–2022) and subsequently North Head Operations Pty Ltd (from May 2022) to offer accommodation, tours, dining and hold events and functions on site. This repurposing and readaptation of the existing buildings allows visitors to experience the heritage, beauty and fragility of the site as they learn about its history.

The Quarantine Station site is today listed on the National Heritage register and the NSW State register. Our site brings together the stories of all Australians whether Aboriginal, colonial, migrant and our current visitors. By discovering the past together, we can write the next chapters of our shared Australian story.



We hope you have enjoyed your visit today.

Q Station is the perfect place to create your own piece of history, whether it be for quiet breaks immersing yourself in the solitude, breathtaking views and peaceful environment; or for celebratory family gatherings; for memorable weekends with friends or for teambuilding with colleagues.

With direct access to Sydney Harbour and situated within beautiful bushland, Q Station has offerings for both day trips and overnight guests. Hotel accommodation, unique venues, outdoor sites for events, conferences and weddings, tours and educational programs, restaurants and bars offering varied dining options are all part of the experience.

We look forward to your next visit.

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