

The Quarantine Station

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By the end of the nineteenth century landowners of Tasmania were aiming to improve the quality of their herds of cattle. Many considered the ideal way of doing this was to import proven stock from the well established studs in the United Kingdom. It was a long and hazardous journey for the animals. On departure they may have been passed as disease free, but the possibility existed that they were incubating a disease during the journey, or were infected of the diseases prevalent at that time in the ports of call, especially in countries with climates of very high temperatures.

The State Government of the day decided that it was time Tasmania had its own Quarantine Station. Not only would this shorten the journey time by omitting a period of quarantine on the Australian mainland, but it would also reduce the risk of introducing to Tasmania mainland diseases, such as pleuro-pneumonia which was unknown here.

Taroona was considered the ideal choice for the Quarantine Station because at this point the River Derwent was relatively narrow, but deep enough to enable overseas ships to anchor fairly close to the shore. The cliffs sheltered a beautiful sandy beach, which was ideal for cattle to wade ashore, and it was close to the capital city, Hobart.

Records¹ show that a letter was sent from the Chambers of the Solicitor General's Department to the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture advising him that an Indenture of Conveyance, dated the 10th February 1891, of 28 acres 1 rood 37 perches of land, had been transferred to the Minister for Lands and Works of the State Government. This was part of the property named "Nubeena", owned by Mr J.B. Poynter. Permission had also been obtained for construction of a road to gain entry to the acquired land and the right "to erect a boat house or any building for aquatic purposes on the land surrounded by a given line on the plan"². The plan showed this line followed the foreshore of Taroona Beach.

From 1891, when the State Government accepted responsibility for developing the land as a Quarantine Station, no reliable records are

available until 1929. We do know³ that by 1908 the Commonwealth Government had joined with the State Government to share some of the responsibility and financial commitment for running the Station. This arrangement continued through the years of World War I and from 1918 the Station became a part of the Commonwealth Government.

In 1918 an area of land, known as "Nubeena" and comprising 35 acres 3 roods 3 perches, was bought by the Commonwealth Government for the sum of £4,565 8s 0d⁴. This was approximately 7 acres more than the State Government acquired from Mr Poynter in 1891. Later records⁵ show yet another figure of 34 acres 3 roods 29 perches of land purchased by the Commonwealth on the 1st March 1918. Fortunately the purchase price remained steady.

We must assume that after land was obtained for a Quarantine Station in 1891, and before regular records were kept, a house and possibly a boat shed on the beach were built. We learn⁶ in 1929 that Mr C. Vicary was caretaker at the Station. On the 30th August 1929 the S.S. "Lutana" lowered over its side 15 Friesian heifers and 3 bulls to swim ashore. No doubt Mr Vicary rowed out in his dinghy to meet and shepherd them ashore on Taroona Beach and from there they would have been driven up the slope to the comfort of well grassed paddocks and ample space. This must have been like heaven after the confined spaces on board the "Lutana". After veterinary examination their condition was recorded as "very poor"⁷.

What a gamble the owners of cattle faced all those years ago! If their new stock survived the journey the first glimpse the owners had of them probably plummeted their feelings to an all time low. The owners were obliged to pay for their cattle's enforced stay in the Quarantine Station. Charges in 1929 were £2 5s 0d or 6d per day for each cow over 3 years of age⁸. Young calves were suckled by their mothers, but if extra fodder was required an arrangement was made for the owners to supply this or a small additional fee was charged.

At the completion of the 90 days' quarantine period a further compulsory veterinary examination was made before the cattle were released to their owners. Should this date fall due on a Sunday it was permis-

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sible for the examination and release to be carried out the previous day⁹. This was necessary to evade the law which clearly stated that no cattle were to travel on Sundays. Stock belonging to owners of nearby properties were probably walked to their destination with stockmen on horseback in charge. Others, such as the two Jersey heifers with one heifer calf, which was born on the Station while the mother was in quarantine and belonging to Messrs Barnett Bros. of Woodstock, Huon¹⁰, were no doubt transported by an open truck. The roads outside Hobart were not sealed in those days so travelling with cattle to the Huon must have been quite a venture.

During 1930 only 18 cattle were quarantined at Taroona, all belonging to Mr Willis L. Hay of Cascades. This indicated that even in the thirties bringing cattle from overseas and the mainland was still risky and expensive. However it was still essential that the paddocks be kept in good order and obviously this was done because we read¹¹ that, as Cape Weed was becoming prevalent in some areas, the paddocks were sprayed with Sodium Chlorate.

Fencing was of major importance and in 1932, after many letters¹² had passed between the Caretaker and the Department of Agriculture, money was allocated for some repairs. As the land and buildings were owned by the Commonwealth this necessitated more correspondence. In 1932 the following was supplied¹³:

450 split posts	£39.7.6
200 split rails	£15.0.0
2 large gates	£7.0.0



View of the River Derwent from the paddocks at the Quarantine Station.

PHOTO CONNIE MANSBRIDGE.

At the same time the Caretaker's dwelling was in need of repair and so the following items were added to the above list¹⁴.

1 600 gallon tank	£4.5.0
5 lengths flue and spark arrester for Malley bath heater	13.6
1 sash and 4 panes of glass	£2.0.0
1 tin Pabco Hydro-seal for repairs to spoutings	10.0
Materials only: Total	<u>£68.16.0</u>

By 1933 cattle were arriving in better condition, especially those from the mainland, but the last part of their journey, swimming ashore from the ship, was still a real test of endurance. Ships were arriving in summer and winter, in good weather and bad, and those of us who have lived in Taroona for many years know just how changeable and treacherous the waters of the River Derwent can be. It was therefore no surprise when a letter¹⁵ was sent from the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Jersey Herd Society to the Director of Agriculture condemning beasts having to swim ashore. It was suggested that cattle could be landed at the wharf in Hobart and conveyed to the Quarantine Station, either on floats, in the animal boxes in which they travelled, or in a truck or approved vehicle. Mr T. Philp, the Chief Quarantine Officer, quoted the Tasmanian regulations¹⁶ which required the mode of entry of overseas stock to be direct by water and, as there was still the fear of pleuro-pneumonia from the mainland, this was still the rule for both mainland and overseas arrivals.

The Jersey Herd Society then suggested a jetty be built out into the river from Taroona Beach¹⁷. This would enable the cattle to be off loaded directly from the ship onto the jetty and then guided to the beach and the Station, without having to risk drowning in the River Derwent. This jetty was eventually built and there are families still living in Taroona who remember it and the cattle being brought ashore along its decking.

In 1934 the rules regarding arrivals from overseas were revised¹⁸. Some animals were allowed to be taken into Hobart and brought down to the Quarantine Station by road, but interstate stock were still required to enter via the Station's jetty.

After laws concerned with the transport of animals to the Quarantine Station had been changed more stock arrived by road. From 1939 we begin to read letters¹⁹ about the condition of the roads. It is difficult now to visualise the Channel Highway and Nubeena Crescent without bitumen but even when we arrived in 1952 they still had not been sealed. In the winter of 1939 conditions must have been exceptionally bad because on the 13th July two trucks with cattle arrived and each became bogged in the mud, not once, but twice²⁰. It was not until those trucks were inside the gates of the Quarantine Station that the cattle could be off-loaded. On another occasion, the 31st July, trucks delivering chaff were bogged at the gates. Realizing that it was necessary to lighten the loads before they could be moved, the caretaker hired a horse drawn buggy, transferred the chaff, and by making several muddy journeys to the store sheds, managed to take delivery of his essential feed. Presumably once that was accomplished help was given to the drivers to unbog their vehicles and start them on their return journey to Hobart.

Needless to say events such as these resulted in a stream of correspondence²¹ between the Department of Agriculture and the James Bros., trustees of the estate of G. James, Esquire, through which the approach road to the Station ran. As there was a question concerning the exact land owned by the Commonwealth it was of great importance to clear this matter up as soon as possible. The road was a danger when cattle were being moved and possibly a dangerous situation to humans could arise if an accident occurred and cattle escaped from the trucks.

Very little is known about the size and design of the house in which the Caretaker and his family lived, but in 1938 it was obviously in urgent need of repairs and alterations²². During some previous alteration a back porch had been added. The concrete floor was poured slightly below the level of the outside ground, with the result that every time it rained water poured over the concrete porch and into the house. This and other repairs were essential in 1938, but the paddocks, fencing and out buildings took priority. In spite of numerous letters requesting work be done on the house, it was not until the end of 1938 these requests were satisfied at a cost of £149 0s 0d, including²³:

3 coats of paint on House, including tanks and outhouses of residence	£25.0.0
1 new stove	£10.0.0

Another interesting item at this time was the electricity charges for the year 1934-35 for the "cottages and stables": £6 16s 10d. This was to be paid by the Department of Health, Canberra²⁴.

By the end of 1940 questions regarding land boundaries appear to have been resolved and for all subsequent records it was necessary to have on file not only letters, but photographs and sketch maps of all paddocks, sheds and buildings, and the maximum number of cattle they were capable of accommodating²⁵.

On at least two occasions in 1914 when Sir Ernest Shackleton was organising his historic journeys to Antarctica his teams of huskies, so essential to the success of his travels, were quarantined at Tarooma²⁶. It was important that they left Tasmania in peak condition and so the usual sixty days' residence did not apply. In fact, they lived at the Station for considerably longer, receiving training and expert veterinary attention, to attain the best condition for their long journeys. Sir Ernest visited them on several occasions during these times. When his ship was ready to sail the dogs were transported directly from the Quarantine Station to the wharf and immediately taken aboard.

The post war era heralded the arrival of not only people migrating from the United Kingdom, but also their pets. From the 1940s more dogs and cats appear in the records as being quarantined at the Station. This must have been an extremely busy period because many letters²⁷ were received by the Department of Agriculture complaining at the length of time it took to obtain a vacancy for cattle, dogs and cats at the Station. This in turn dictated the shipping arrangements.

In 1948 four more kennels were built and much thought and planning were put into them by the Department²⁸. No dog could have wished for a better home in its new country: a cosy and roomy enclosed rest area with a well fenced run leading from it. The word must have been broadcast through the neighbourhood for later it was noticed that local dogs and cats were jumping the fences to get into the Quarantine Station. This was once thought to be impossible.



The Caretaker's house at the Quarantine Station, 1947. PHOTO CONNIE MANSBRIDGE

Something had to be done. I found it amusing to read that, together with other fencing, paw and nose-proof fencing was supplied and erected to ensure complete quarantine conditions for the dogs and cats. As the migrant population in Tasmania increased, so too did the dog and cat imports, especially when migrants began arriving by air.

We must not forget the visiting yachts in Hobart. Many have pets on board which are subject to quarantine regulations²⁹. Unless the owners can guarantee that their pets remain on board during their stay accommodation must be found for them at the Quarantine Station. It is difficult to ensure that a cat will not jump ashore while a yacht is tied up to a wharf. Some of the dogs in residence were valuable show or stud animals and at one stage in the 1970s it was suggested that Tasmania follow the pattern of the Sydney Quarantine Station and employ kennel maids to bath, groom and exercise the dogs during their sixty days of quarantine!³⁰

Many people will remember a small zoo which operated at Granton, but how many

people realise that several animals from there, such as camels and water buffaloes, were transported to the Quarantine Station for blood tests? The CSIRO conducted tests on native hens and tasmanian devils at the Station also, as these tests were considered necessary for the safety of the general public³¹.

From 1940-1970 the growth and needs of Taroona changed dramatically and by 1949 the Kingborough Council had begun its numerous requests for the Quarantine Station land to be granted or sold to them for use as a sport and recreation reserve³².

Life inside the Station appeared unaffected by these negotiations. Bulls escaped from their paddock, necessitating the installation of an electric fence on the 21st July 1947. An electricity pole fell down during a bout of rough weather³³, leaving the Station with no electricity for a weekend. Trucks still became bogged and the Caretaker's residence, built in 1908, had a much needed face lift³⁴.

Estimates for 1949 for fences, gates, watering troughs, dog boxes, concrete floors in sheds, electric fences, sheep pens and dips

a concrete ramp, lining of a shed for use as an office, road dressing and alterations to the residence were £4,325. Of this £683 was quoted for repairs to the house, including³⁵:

Painting	£115
Drains and septic tank	£40
Making kitchen, bathroom, W.C., wooden floors, lining all walls, remodelling two fireplaces	£250
Hot water, stove, electric light and power	£130
External repairs	£20
Repairs to laundry and copper, etc.	£40
300 ft of 5 ft paling fence, double and single gates	£75
Rotary clothes line	£13
Total	£683

It must have been exciting for my parents, who were living there then, to have an inside septic toilet, a bathroom, running hot water and their own fenced garden with a rotary clothes line.

Yes, 1949 was the year of change and the demise of the original Tarooma Quarantine Station. By March 1949 it had been decided to hand back to the control of the Minister of the Interior 18 acres: 6 acres of flat land to the North and 12 acres of rising ground to the South-West³⁶. It would have been a calamity if the Kingborough Council had lost it through a sale to another buyer. To prevent

this Councillor McPartlan asked that steps be taken for the land to be handed back to the State Government for vesting in the Kingborough Council. The Commonwealth was to be allowed to use the land for as long as necessary. It was found that the War Service Homes Commission had first claim to the land but, fortunately for the Kingborough Council, the commission agreed to waive all rights³⁷. It is well known the transfers of Government land take time³⁸ and so it was 1954 before the Commonwealth handed back the required land to the State Government in three separate lots³⁹:

- (1) 6 acres 1 rood 39 perches
- (2) 13 acres 0 roods 5 perches
- (3) 39.7 perches

Lots 1 and 2 were sold to the State for £2,500 and lot 3 was transferred free of cost. In return Kingborough Council purchased this land for the same price⁴⁰ and it is now known as Tarooma Park.

In 1963 Kingborough Council obtained further land comprising 3 roods 2/10 perches and 3 roods 27 perches at a cost of £1600, plus £43 in transfer and legal fees⁴¹. The Council undertook to complete the following work within three months⁴²:

- (1) Construct a new entrance road wide enough for large trucks.



Mr George Doughty, Caretaker of the Quarantine Station from 1947-1963, feeding some of the stock.

PHOTO CONNIE MANSBRIDGE.

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- (2) Erect new gates.
- (3) Erect property fences.

The area left as a Quarantine Station for the residence, pens and yards was 14 acres 1 rood 1.9 perches⁴³. The maximum number of animals allowed there was 24.

As Taroona was still growing rapidly and more land was needed for further community development, Kingborough Council felt that a small area, surrounded by residential and sporting sites, was badly placed for use by animals for quarantine purposes⁴⁴. It therefore requested the Commonwealth to relinquish all claim to the remaining land, thus enabling the Council to develop it for use as recreational ovals⁴⁵.

Sites of 15 acres or more were sought nearer the Hobart airport or the port of Hobart but none as suitable as Taroona was found⁴⁶. It was pointed out⁴⁷

that Veterinary Science has developed to a stage where it can easily handle diseases caused by bacteria but as modern diseases are caused by viruses and spread by biting insects isolation from stock population is of paramount importance and therefore a residential or industrial area is ideal for a Quarantine Station.

It was also noted that the Quarantine Station had had little use in recent years, owing to a ban on ruminants, mainly because of an outbreak of Blue Tongue⁴⁸. That ban was still in operation, though in 1972 cattle from New Zealand had been exempted. An outbreak of rabies in the United Kingdom caused a prohibition of dogs to Australia from October 1969 to July 1971. In spite of these bans and the little use being made of the remaining land, it was considered essential that a Quarantine Station remain in Taroona.

More bites were made into the 14 acres in 1962 when the Kingborough Council requested the Commonwealth to allow a Sewerage Treatment Plant to be built, not on reserve land already held, but on Commonwealth land still part of the Quarantine Station⁴⁹. This permission was granted in 1962. In 1966 the Kingborough Council was irate to learn that 1 acre of land had been acquired by the Tasmania Department of Sea Fisheries, on which it was proposed to build a Marine Research Laboratory⁵⁰.

“Was the Minister not aware of the battle waging for the land for a sporting oval?”

The Tasmania Department of Sea Fisheries built the Marine Research Laboratory and a residence!

The day of the terrible bushfires in February 1967 saw a magnificent effort by the residents of Taroona to contain the fires as they crept nearer to the Station. Several fences and buildings were destroyed, but fortunately no animals were trapped or burnt.

By 1976 the Quarantine Station had dwindled to a mere 2.77 hectares (or 2.263 hectares, depending on which letter one reads) and questions were still being asked⁵²:

Is this land still being used for quarantine purposes? Why not have one Quarantine Station only but in the north of the State?

It was already too late, for in July 1975 those few remaining hectares ceased to be operational on a full time basis as a Quarantine Station.

In 1982, 5.123 hectares of land was bought back by the State Government from the Commonwealth and handed to the Lands Department. In an emergency this land could be opened with little delay to receive animals once again.

Acknowledgements

Mr Dennis Witt, Jill and other staff members of the Department of Agriculture.
Mr Bill Taylor of the Archive Office of Tasmania.
Mr Dave Pillinger, former Veterinary Officer with the Department of Agriculture.

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