

SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE OBJECT

REGISTER ENTRY

Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

NAME: Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection **OBJECT NO.:** 26583-001

Object intrinsically related to Torrens Island Quarantine Station Complex (SHP 26583)

ADDRESS: Karna Country

Grand Trunkway, Torrens Island 5015

CT 6211/942 D90964 A300; CT 6211/943 D90964 A301; CT 6212/771 D90964 Q302; CT 6212/771 D90964 Q306

Hundred of Port Adelaide

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Place

The Torrens Island Quarantine Station was established in 1855 as the first line of defence against the transmission of infectious diseases into the colony and is associated with human and animal quarantine practices in South Australia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Developed over the course of a century, the Torrens Island Quarantine Station Complex is the only example of its class to exist in South Australia and retains a faithful representation of structures dating from the 1870s until the 1970s. The Station Complex demonstrates the standardisation of quarantine legislation and innovations in medical sciences and disease control at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of the buildings, such as the bathing block and luggage disinfecting block, demonstrate the transition from miasma theory to germ theory of disease transmission. The Torrens Island Quarantine Station Complex provides a unique insight into the experience of thousands of migrants arriving by sea. It was also an essential facility as it supported the colony and later state's primary industries by facilitating the importation of disease-free livestock.

Approved by the South Australian Heritage Council on 5 September 2024.

Object

The Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection is intrinsically related to the practice of human and animal quarantine at the Torrens Island Quarantine Station during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The collection is predominantly comprised of objects dating from the 1910s when the Commonwealth government took over the management of the station through to the closure of animal quarantine in the 1990s. From grave markers to animal specimen boxes, the wide-ranging collection demonstrates several aspects of the quarantine experience in South Australia such as administration, daily experiences of patients and staff, disinfection processes, disease management, and the fatal effects of infectious diseases prior to the advent of mass immunisations.

COMMENTARY ON THE LISTING

Description and notes with respect to an object entered in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

Physical Description

The Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection comprises a diverse range of objects that originate from the Torrens Island Quarantine Station (TIQS). The collection contains 43 objects associated with the daily management and experience of human and animal quarantine and includes street signs, specimen boxes, bed linens and tramway trolleys. The earliest object, a grave marker commemorating the life of Frederick C. Smith, dates from the colonial period of the station in 1895, and the latest objects were used at the animal quarantine station prior to its closing in 1995. The collection also contains a number of objects from the period when TIQS was part of the Commonwealth Quarantine Service (CQS). A full list and description of each item in the collection is located in Appendix A: Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection - Catalogue of Objects.

Elements of Significance:

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection as described in Appendix A.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of object include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Period items or property that contributes to the atmosphere of the place and does not originate from the quarantine station.

History of the Object

The Commonwealth Quarantine Period

Several of the objects in the Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection, hereafter TIQS Collection, originate from the period when the quarantine station was managed by the Commonwealth government.¹ The Commonwealth Quarantine Service (CQS), and later the Commonwealth Department of Health, administered the quarantine station from approximately 1909 until the closure of human quarantine in 1981. Many textiles in the collection brandish the CQS stamp (TIQS2024.24-26, TIQS2024.40).

With the introduction of the germ theory of disease transmission at the turn of the twentieth century, disinfection became an essential quarantine practice at Torrens Island. Both passengers and their belongings were treated under a strict procedure. Passengers under order of 'personal disinfection' by a Quarantine Officer were

processed through the bathing block. Partitioned into individual cubicles, the space was separated into 'foul' and 'clean' corridors, with separate entrances and exits to prevent cross contamination. Each cubicle had undressing, disinfecting and 'clean' dressing spaces separated by doors. Tagged and sterilised clothes for each contact were placed in the clean dressing space by the attendants.² These clean clothes were collected and sterilised in the laundry block prior to passenger disembarkation. Personal possessions such as money, purses and pens were 'deloused' using a mix of formalin and Condy's crystals, an oxidising agent with disinfectant and deodorising properties.³

Temporary quarantine assistants were responsible for laundry duties under the direction of the Foreman Assistant. In addition to sterilising and drying the clothing of new arrivals, the laundry also had a role in washing and sterilising linen, both for contacts and patients at the isolation hospital.⁴ Large quantities of water were used, and staff used timber 'duckboards' (TIQS2024.43) to ensure secure footing across wet areas of the laundry block.

Personal baggage was taken directly from the ship to the luggage disinfection block by tramway trolleys (TIQS2024.12, TIQS2024.13). The tramway system was designed to carry loaded trolleys from the ship directly to the disinfecting block and autoclave, and then on to accommodation areas without having to offload any goods. Belongings were either disinfected by high-pressure and high-temperature steam in the autoclave, or by formalin in the fumigation chamber.⁵ The TIQS Collection contains several items associated with the operation and maintenance of the autoclave, including a certificate of registration (TIQS2024.15), safety reports (TIQS2024.16-17) and a valve tag (TIQS2024.14).

The original four-room cottages built in 1878 were designed to accommodate up to eight second-class visitors at a time. All beds were single size, with two beds per room (TIQS2024.3-TIQS2024.8). These cottages were usually allotted to either a family of up to eight, or two families consisting of up to four persons. For smaller family units, the cottage was subdivided into two areas by bolting a connecting door. Each subdivision had its own entrance.⁶ Other items in the collection associated with the provision of accommodation facilities include a bed locker (TIQS2024.41) and wastepaper baskets (TIQS2024.38-39).

Death on Torrens Island

There are 16 persons known to be buried in the TIQS cemetery. They died of smallpox, plaque, influenza, tuberculosis, malaria, and leprosy. The first recorded burial at the cemetery was in 1887, however the person's identity and cause of death is unknown.⁷

Following the removal of all the original timber grave markers in the 1980s, nine were replaced with metal signs. The TIQS Collection contains three original grave markers. Frederick Charles Smith (TIQS2024.10) died of smallpox in the quarantine station's

isolation hospital on 21 July 1895 after arriving on the *Lusitania*.⁸ Smith's burial was arranged for by the Orient Company who owned the quarantined ship. A coffin was delivered by launch to the quarantine station and flowers were provided by E. E. Harrold of Largs Bay and the quarantine officer's wife.⁹

There were five burials at TIQS in 1919 as a result of the influenza pandemic following the First World War. Timber grave markers belonging to two of the patients are included in the collection. L. D. Dickenson (TIQS2024.1) was Chief Steward of the *Coolcha* and Albert E. Carter (TIQS2024.11) was First Cook on the *SS Saros*. Both died in June 1919.¹⁰

Animal Quarantine

By the late 1970s, the threat of human infectious diseases of epidemic proportions was thought to be overcome. With mass immunisation and vaccinations, diseases such as smallpox were eradicated.¹¹ This coincided with an increase in mass air travel, replacing sea travel. Human quarantine at TIQS officially closed in 1980 but remained open for animal quarantine until 1995.

Following the closure of human quarantine, animal quarantine extended its station north, taking over the human quarantine site and its buildings. It was used predominately for the breeding of overseas animal species and the quarantine of imported pets.¹² Several objects dating from this period of animal quarantine survive, including an animal specimen box (TIQS2024.37a-b), a concrete drinking trough (TIQS2024.19), a feeding station (TIQS2024.20) and an animal enclosure map featuring structures which were demolished when animal quarantine closed (TIQS2024.36).

Management of the Collection Since 1980

Following the closure of human quarantine in 1980, the laundry block became the temporary repository for historic quarantine artefacts and documents. The display was named after South Australia's then Chief Quarantine Officer, Allen Cutler Green. The 1878 timber cottage was fitted out as a representative display of living conditions with beds, furniture and textiles arranged and placed on display in three rooms, where they have remained since.¹³

Records such as site plans, admissions papers and photographs, were removed to the National Archives of Australia in 1985. In 1987, the National Museum of Australia (NMA) acquired approximately 200 objects from the quarantine station. This collection is known as the Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection. Records held by both institutions were used in identifying and confirming the origins of the objects that were kept on site.

In the early 2020s, following the COVID-19 pandemic, an exhibition titled *The Q and You* was established in the waiting room by the South Australian Maritime Museum and the Department for Environment and Water. Several wall decals, banners and

prop objects were installed along with three grave markers belonging to Frederick Charles Smith, A. Carter, and Doris M. Dimsey.¹⁴

Chronology

- 1850 The *Quarantine Act* is assented.
- 1855 Passengers of the *Taymouth Castle* are the first to be quarantined on Torrens Island.
- 1879 The quarantine station is established on Torrens Island, replacing an earlier quarantine encampment.**
- 1882 The colonial government acquires all other private land on Torrens Island.
- 1885 **The land on Torrens Island is converted to Crown land.**
- 1888 The *Stock Disease Act* is assented regulating quarantine provisions for communicable diseases.
- 1908 The Commonwealth *Quarantine Act* is assented. The Act is administered by the Department of Trade until 1921.
- 1909 The Commonwealth Government takes over the Torrens Island Quarantine Station.**
- Animal Quarantine is relocated to its present site from the southern end of the island.**
- 1921 The Commonwealth Department of Health is established. Responsibility to administer the *Quarantine Act 1908* is transferred to the Department.
- 1954 The *Strathhaird* is quarantined at Torrens Island with government passengers colloquially known as £10 poms heading for South Australia. This was the last major active quarantine event at the station.
- 1963 Construction of Torrens Island Power Station commences on the southern tip of the island.
- 1965 Construction begins on the Grand Trunkway Bridge over the North Arm to Garden Island and a causeway between Garden and Torrens Island.
- 1966 A track is constructed from the southern end of the island, replacing the jetty as the primary access to TIQS.
- 1969 Alan (Allen) Green Museum collection is initiated.
- 1985 Records including photographs are acquired by the National Archives of Australia.
- 1987 The National Museum of Australia acquires approximately 200 objects from the quarantine station. They were previously stored in the Laundry Block as part of the Alan Green Museum.
- 2001 The quarantine station site is transferred from the Commonwealth to the Government of South Australia.

- 2011 The Police and Australian Army use Torrens Island for training exercises.
South Australian Maritime Museum tours commence.
- 2015 The *Quarantine Act 1908* is superseded by the *Biosecurity Act 2015*.

References

Reports

- South Australian Heritage Council. 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station, Summary of State Heritage Place.' Department for Environment and Water, 2024.
- Habitable Places. 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station CMP Volume 1.' Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, 2014.
- Habitable Places. 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station CMP Volume 2.' Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, 2015.
- Dusting, Rob. 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station Conservation Management Plan.' Report prepared for Australian Estate Management by Works Australia, June 1996.
- McDougall, Katrina and Elizabeth Vines. 'Torrens Island Conservation Analysis.' Report prepared for Australian Construction Services by McDougall & Vines, April 1988.

Archival Collections

- National Archives Australia, Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection.
- National Museum of Australia. Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection.

Newspapers

- News. 'Island Ready for Mooltan People.' 31 May 1949.
- SA Register*. 'The Quarantine Station.' 27 January 1879.
- South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, 'Proclamation,' 3 June 1837, p.2.

OBJECT DETAILS

Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection
Grand Trunkway, Torrens Island

OBJECT NO.: 26583-001

DESCRIPTION OF OBJECT: Collection of objects used at the Torrens Island Quarantine Station.

REGISTER STATUS: Identification: 14 March 2024
Provisional Entry: 12 December 2024
Confirmation: 10 April 2025

CURRENT USE: Interpretive displays and storage
1995 -

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Unincorporated

LOCATION: **Street Name:** Grand Trunkway
Town/Suburb: Torrens Island
Post Code: 5015

LAND DESCRIPTION: **Title** CT 6211/942 D90964 A300, CT 6211/943 D90964 A301, CT 6212/771 D90964 Q302, CT 6212/771 D90964 Q306

Hundred: Port Adelaide

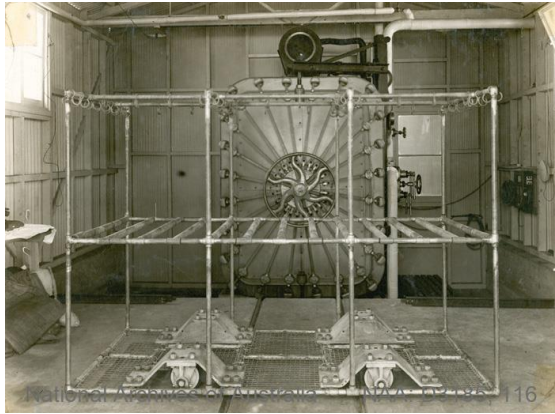
Locations of individual objects are identified in Appendix A

PHOTOS

Torrens Island Quarantine Station Collection

OBJECT NO.: 26583-001

Grand Trunkway, Torrens Island



Tramway trolleys 1925-1945.

Source: NAA D3185 116 (left), NAA D3185 120 (right)



Tramway trolleys (TIQS2024.12, TIQS2024.13) in situ in the Luggage Disinfecting Block.

Source: DEW Files, Oct 2024



Charles Barbour Street at the Torrens Island Quarantine Station c.1972.

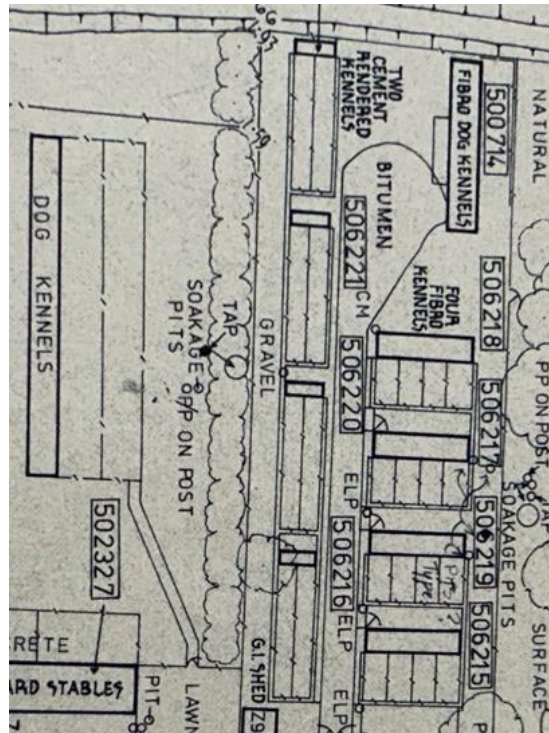
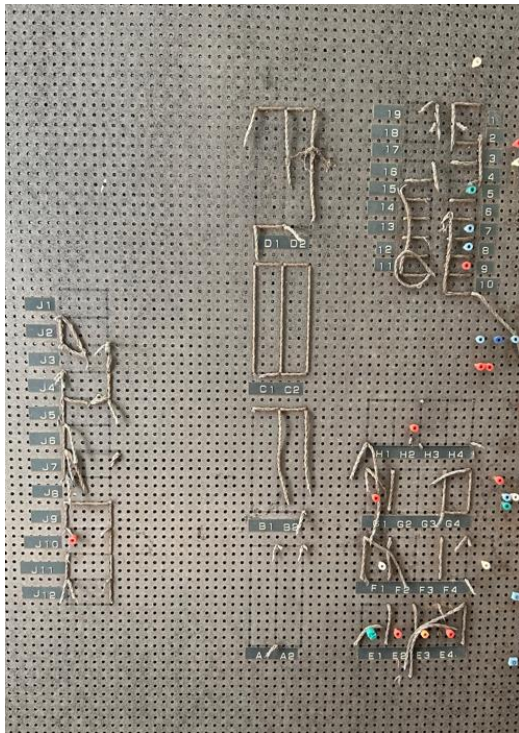
Source: NAA D3481 3898/12A



Street sign for Charles Barbour Road (TIQS2024.2) and Quarantine Staff Sign (TIQS2024.22).

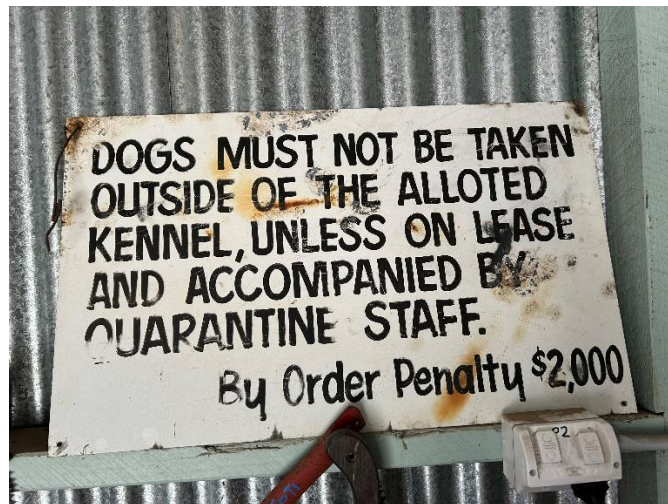
Source: DEW Files, 2024

Grand Trunkway, Torrens Island



Animal enclosure map (TIQS2024.36) on left with site plan outlining corresponding enclosures on right (image flipped to match enclosure map).

Source: DEW Files, 2024



Sign from Animal Quarantine (TIQS2024.21).

Source: DEW Files, 2024



Beds (TIQS2024.3a-b, TIQS2024.4a-b) and Bed Locker (TIQS2024.40) displayed in the 1878 Accommodation Cottage.

Source: DEW Files, 2024



Wastepaper basket (TIQS2024.28) and Blanket (TIQS2024.23) were used in the 1878 Accommodation Cottage.

Source: DEW Files, 2024



Grave markers of Reverend Alex Still (foreground) and L. Dickenson (TIQS2024.) (background) at the Torrens Island Quarantine Station cemetery.

Source: NAA D2303, 1



Grave markers of L. Dickenson (TIQS2024.1) (left) and Frederick Charles Smith (TIQS2024.10) (right).

Source: DEW Files, 2024

-
- ¹ Habitable Places, 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station CMP Volume 1,' Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, 2014, p.24.
- ² Habitable Places, 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station CMP Volume 2,' Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, 2015, p.55.
- ³ News, 'Island Ready for Mooltan People,' 31 May 1949, p.6.
- ⁴ Habitable Places, 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station CMP Volume 2,' p.41.
- ⁵ Formalin is a solution of formaldehyde and water. NAA, D2166, Item 23, *Notice – Passengers' Luggage*, p.25.
- ⁶ NAA, D2166, Item 23, *Allocation of Accommodation at Torrens Island*, Appendix 2., p.31
- ⁷ Habitable Places, 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station CMP Volume 2,' p.227.
- ⁸ *Evening News*, 'Intercolonial,' 26 July 1895, p.3.
- ⁹ *Evening News*, 'Intercolonial,' p.3.
- ¹⁰ NAA, D2303, Vol.1, *Register of Graves*, p.2.
- ¹¹ Katrina McDougall and Elizabeth Vines, 'Torrens Island Conservation Analysis,' report prepared for Australian Construction Services by McDougall & Vines (April 1988), p.9.
- ¹² Rob Dusting, 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station Conservation Management Plan,' Report prepared for Australian Estate Management by Works Australia, June 1996, p.8.
- ¹³ Habitable Places, 'Torrens Island Quarantine Station CMP Volume 2,' p.145.
- ¹⁴ History Trust of South Australia, Department for Environment and Water, *Q and You*, interpretive display, Waiting Room, Torrens Island Quarantine Station. Doris M. Dimsey died from smallpox in Launceston, Tasmania in August 1903. Her grave marker, along with those of Edward Elphinstone and Ellen Young were mistakenly brought to Torrens Island following the closure of the quarantine station. They do not form part of the TIQS Collection.