

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PRECINCT

This section is partially based on the NHQS CMP (2000) Section 5.5, but with additional information and amendments where new information has come to light in the preparation of this DACMP. It should be noted that the boundaries of the Precinct have been altered in this study (refer to the Precinct Location Plan at the beginning of this Volume for the study boundaries). The text has been altered accordingly.

2.1 PRECINCT BOUNDARIES

The Wharf Precinct occupies the triangular shaped area of low ground at the foot of the natural depression on the waterfront at Quarantine Beach extending up the rise to include the First Cemetery site on the slope below building P27. The area has been assumed to include the wharf, the beach and seabed, the level ground and eight inter-related buildings that were designed to process passengers and their luggage through a disinfecting system upon arrival at the Quarantine Station.

This study recommends the adjustment of the Precinct in two areas: firstly the inclusion of the whole of the First Cemetery site (the NHQS CMP (2000) includes only part of the site); and secondly the creation of a sub-Precinct called 'Cannae Point' which includes Cannae Point and the ground between the Wharf Precinct and the Hospital/Isolation Precinct. This recommendation stems from the recognition of the sensitivity of the identified Aboriginal sites contained in it and to facilitate management of this area independent of future uses of the Quarantine Station core area.

The area of water and the seabed surrounding the wharf also contain several significant, natural and cultural resources. These include historic artifacts that were dumped from quarantined vessels or lost overboard; the sea grass, fish species and sea horses. This study only deals with the artifacts.

Note that any proposals for use of the wharf or immediate waterway will be required to include an assessment of impact as part of the approval process. These studies are outside the scope of the DACMP which specifically considers cultural heritage relating to the quarantine use of the Station.

2.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

North Head was first used as a site for quarantining ships in 1828, following a proclamation by Governor Darling. Previously other sites around Sydney Harbour, such as Neutral Bay, were used for temporary quarantine (Jack in Travis Partners 1987; 13). The death of Darling's son from whooping cough in early 1828 prompted the Governor to recognise that the colony needed a better system of quarantine (ibid; 15). On 2 August 1828 he declared that the infected ship *Busserah Merchant* had to anchor at Spring Cove and that the convicts and their guards were to be housed in tents on shore (Foley 1995; 18).

From this time onwards North Head was used as the site for ship and passenger quarantine. However it was not until 1837-38 that permanent buildings were erected on the site. The New

South Wales Legislative Council agreed to the establishment of a Quarantine Station at North Head in 1837 and allocated £1 774 8s 9.5d for the purpose of constructing 'Buildings and Enclosures' (ibid; 35). In this period the Quarantine Station was first divided into a Healthy Ground and a Sick Ground and Quarantine Beach was the first area to be developed for quarantine purposes. It was established as the landing-site for infected ships carrying convicts, migrants and ships' crews. The Wharf Precinct was cleared to accommodate tents and a landing stage was built at the southern end of the beach (A47) (NHQS CMP 2000: 97). This building phase was critically important to the formation of the Quarantine Station because it established the present layout of the site with concentric zones of greater and lesser risk radiating out from the wharf (Thorp in Travis Partners, op cit; 48).

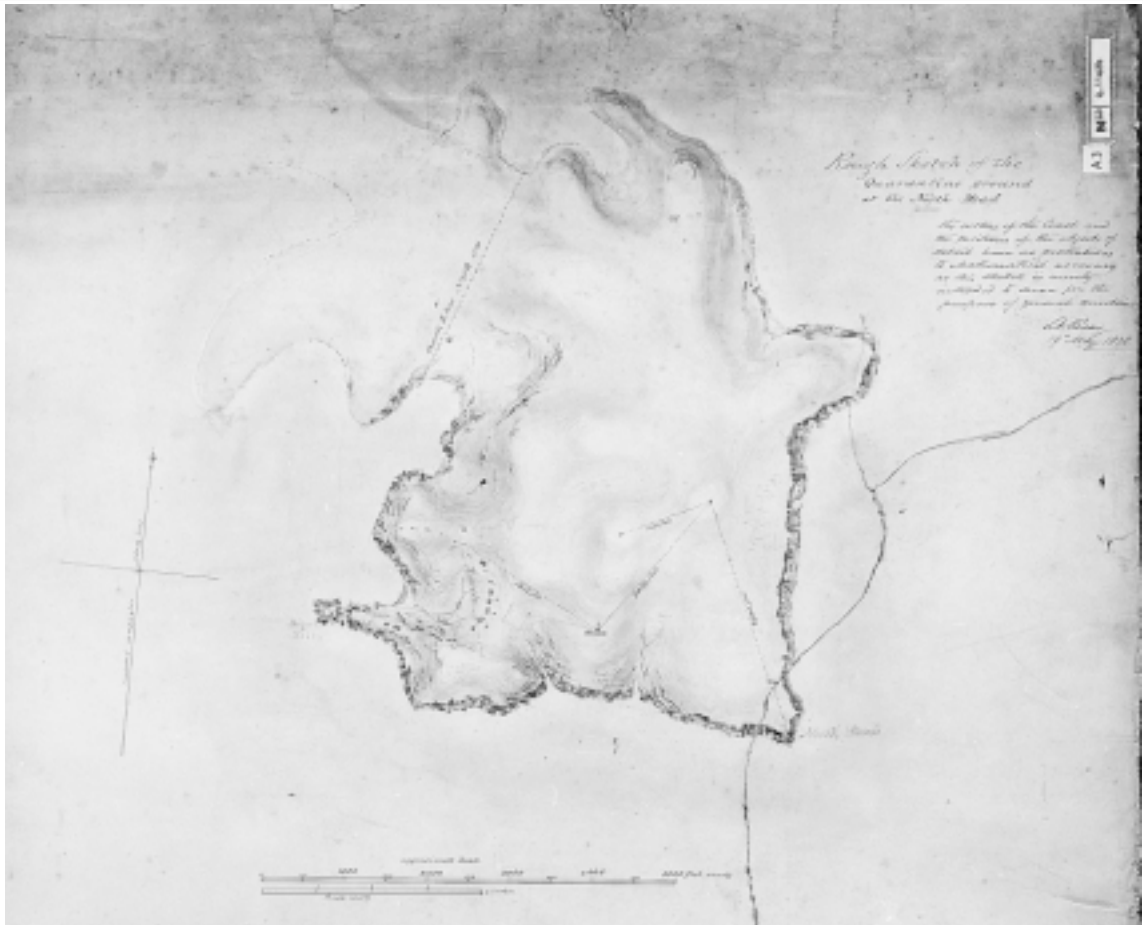
In 1848 the Colonial Secretary called for a report from the Immigration Board on the state of the Quarantine Station in anticipation of the arrival of 35 immigrant ships in 1849 (Foley op.cit; 51). The report recommended some general improvements that included the erection of a shed near the wharf where perishable foods could be delivered in bad weather, and as a *parlatorio* where visitors could talk to those in quarantine. This building was later demolished, probably to make way for new buildings erected in the Wharf Precinct in 1883. A map from 1876 shows a building near the beach that is labelled 'store' but which could be the *parlatorio* (A45). It does not appear on site maps dated 1878, therefore it was definitely demolished before that time (85 /QS M 1536).

Over the next 30 years small improvements continued to be made to the Wharf Precinct. In 1849 a well was dug near Quarantine Beach (PIIIA15) to provide the Station with a permanent water supply (Thorp op cit; 51). In 1852 Captain H H Browne, Agent for Immigration, recommended that the landing stage needed urgent repairs and requested the construction of an 8ft x 6ft building for the purpose of the fumigation of mail (Hedditch et al 1998; 23). Note that this building does not appear on Plan 86 QS M 1536, dated 1876, and may therefore never have been built.

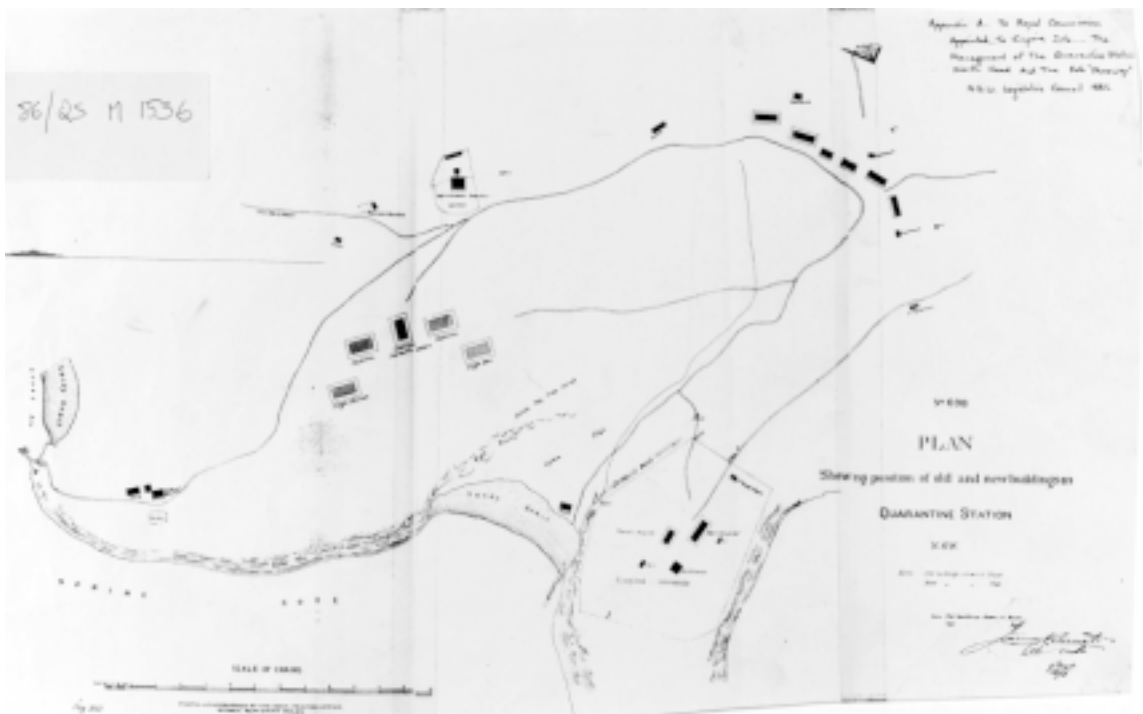
The next major building phase in the Wharf Precinct was in the period 1883-1886. An outbreak of smallpox in the colony in 1881 led to a great deal of criticism of the Quarantine Station. In reaction to this public criticism, on 13 September 1881 the New South Wales Government established a Royal Commission to review the management of the Quarantine Station (Foley op cit; 71). The Royal Commission recognised the need for public health to come under the control of a central body and subsequently the New South Wales Board of Health was established (ibid; 78). In 1882 Dr Charles K MacKellar was appointed to the position of Health Officer to Port Jackson and took a special interest in improving the Quarantine Station (ibid; 80).

Among MacKellar's proposed improvements for the Station were the introduction of a light tram (not undertaken) and improved cleansing facilities at the wharf (which was undertaken). The Wharf Precinct was completely remodelled: the old jetty was replaced with a concrete pier and a new luggage 'Boxstore' (A30), a Steam Laundry (A31), Coal Shed (A48) and steam-operated Fumigation Sheds (possibly also A31) were erected. The laundry was fitted with 26 coppers and 52 cement washing tubs connected to hot and cold water and steam (ibid; 82). Two units of 'Fraser's Disinfecting Apparatus' were installed in the fumigating room, and in 1885 a 'Lyons Patent Steam Disinfecter' was also installed (Hedditch et al op cit; 27).

Early site plans showing the first stages of establishment of the Quarantine Station in the Wharf Precinct



1838



1876

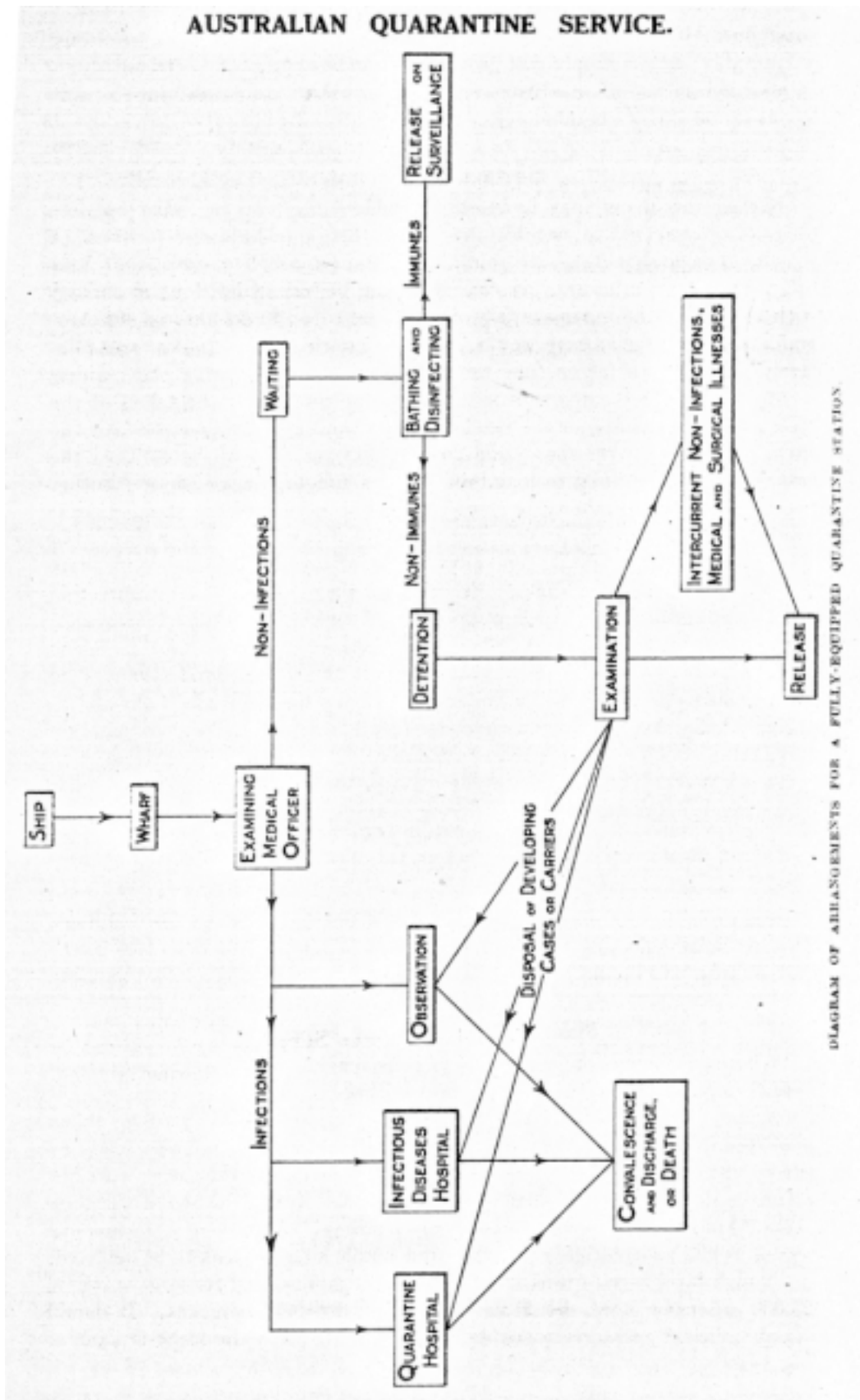


the new steam launch Lorna Doone c1885



jetty and receiving rooms early 1880s

Diagram of the quarantine process from Elkington's article 'Design and Construction of Quarantine Stations' in JHL Cumpston's book *Maritime Quarantine Administration*, 1919



Further towards Cannae Point a new Boat Shed (A34) and Ramp (A34a) were constructed to moor the new steam launch *Lorna Doone* (ibid; 27). In this period several other buildings were also built in the Wharf Precinct, including an Office (A33), Lock-up (A40), a Carpenter's shop (A39), a Receiving Shed (A32), a Smithy (A37) and Cattle Sheds (A42) (CWO 1986; 8). The new facilities received favourable public attention. The *Picturesque Atlas of Australia* in 1888 included this description of the facilities:

'Thanks to the liberality of the Government and the energy of the Health Department, every facility for dealing with the largest passenger-ship has been provided. A steam laundry has been built capable of washing the whole of the linen in twenty-four hours; fumigating chambers for disinfecting all woollen garments are provided, while cottages and pavilion hospitals are scattered about in sufficient numbers, and with a degree of isolation equal to any probable emergency.' (Garren 1974; 70)

The development of the Wharf Precinct in the 1880s reflects the increasing importance of quarantine practice and its control by the Public Health Board. Concern among health professionals about the spread of infectious disease led to the construction of more facilities at the Quarantine Station for disinfecting luggage and clothing from infected ships. The technology of quarantine had also improved and the Station was able to purchase purpose-built machinery for the process of disinfection.

Early in the 20th century the Quarantine Station passed from State control into the hands of the new Australian Quarantine Service. Dr W P Norris became the first Federal Director of Quarantine in 1909 (Hedditch et al op cit; 30). Following an overseas study tour he wrote a report recommending major changes to the Quarantine Station. His report was tabled in the New South Wales Parliament on 31 March 1912 and his recommendations were approved. £80 000 was allocated for the improvements (ibid; 30). The Wharf Precinct was crucial to the redevelopment of the Quarantine Station. It was here that passengers were introduced to the quarantine process. They were disinfected, as was their luggage, before being sent to the appropriate accommodation section of the Station.

The work at the wharf began in 1912 with the demolition of the old buildings on the site and the reclamation of land near the wharf (Foley op cit; 102) which included the construction of a new sea wall and infilling the area. In 1913 the Autoclaves (A7), Boiler House (A6), Laundry (A9) and two Bath Houses (A11-A12) were built (Thorpe op cit; 59). In 1914-15 the Luggage Sheds (A14-A17), Funicular railway (L20) and weatherboard Waiting Room (A5) were added (ibid; 59). The railway pulled luggage from the Luggage Sheds next to the wharf, through the Autoclaves and up 750 ft to the accommodation areas (Hedditch et al op cit; 30). Meanwhile, passengers were disinfected in the bathing blocks before being moved to their barracks (ibid; 48-49). In a manual published by the Federal Quarantine Service in 1919, the buildings at the Quarantine Station were hailed as the hallmark of the new standardised Australian quarantine practices (See J S C Elkington, 'Design and Construction of Quarantine Stations', in *Maritime Quarantine Administration*, Commonwealth of Australia Quarantine Service, Melbourne, 1919). The manual included standard designs for quarantine buildings that were remarkably similar to those built at North Head, suggesting that the redevelopment of this Station was in part a trial of the new Australian quarantine system (Conservation Works Office op cit; 9).

Today the area retains most of the buildings and the layout from this stage of development. A small galvanised iron reception shed for goods (A8) was built next to the Autoclaves in 1917, and in 1919 two inhalation chambers were installed in this building (Hedditch et al op cit; 30). The only other significant changes to the Wharf Precinct layout were the demolition of several buildings and the alteration of several others. The Boatshed (A13) and ramp (A13a) were demolished in 1964 (ibid; 55) and after 1964, the Coal Bunker next to the Boiler House (A10), the Blacksmith's shop (A21) and the Waiting Room (A5) were also removed (ibid; 55). The more significant building changes were the refit of the Boiler House in 1965 and the removal of the 3rd class Bathroom fitout (A11).

2.3 BUILDINGS AND BUILT ELEMENTS

The **Wharf** is a timber jetty structure approx 112ft long by 24ft wide (37m by 8m) located at the southern end of Quarantine Beach. It comprises 44 turpentine piles, double cap wales and girders supporting a hardwood deck, with landing steps on its outer end. It was built in its current form c1909 but has been rebuilt a number of times, most recently in the late 1980s by the NPWS.

The **Luggage Sheds** and **Examination Rooms** (A14-A17) are situated at the entrance to the site on land that was largely reclaimed from the Harbour. The brick building with sawtooth and gable roof has a large apron onto which passengers and their luggage were offloaded at the commencement of the quarantine process. The current building is the second structure to occupy this part of the site. The earlier group of wharf buildings (largely timber) occupied roughly the same footprint but with a smaller wharf. It is likely that the remains of that wharf are under the present structure. The earliest structure in this area was a coal store located against the rock face with a sea wall well behind the current sea wall. There is likely to be archaeological evidence of these structures. The present sea wall was constructed to allow the construction of building A14-A17. The fill used to extend the platform area is of unknown origin and also has archaeological potential. The site railway system that served to move luggage and incoming supplies, including coal for the boilers, commenced on the jetty and ran through and beside the Luggage Sheds.

The **Autoclaves** for luggage (A7) and the **Boiler House** (A6) are along the west/east alignment of the Funicular railway that continued through the Wharf Precinct and up the steep escarpment to the passenger accommodation. These two face brick buildings with pitched gable roofs contain the autoclaves and power plant. The large brick chimney at the southwest corner of the Boiler House is visible from the water from a great distance. They share similar construction and detailing with the other brick buildings in the Precinct, using face brickwork with rusticated stone lintels and combinations of timber and steel roof trusses. These two buildings were founded on deep sand (what appears to be a former creek bed), and have had consequential settlement damage that has resulted in A7 having to be partially reconstructed and A6 showing evidence of subsidence. It is likely that ongoing settlement and movement will affect these and the other brick buildings in the Precinct. They also show evidence of severe rising damp (also common in the other brick buildings in the Precinct) which is likely to be an ongoing condition.

The timber **Coal Bunker** (A10) that stood at the eastern end of this arrangement has been demolished. It overlaid earlier farm buildings and pens that occupied the northern corner of the site. The concrete floor slabs of the Coal Bunker still remain as well as the surrounding pavements and edging. The form of this building and its post locations can be clearly seen in the surviving material.

The two-room timber building (A8) at the western end of the row contains the **Formalin Chambers** that were erected to treat victims of the 1918-19 pneumonic (Spanish) influenza epidemic. This is an unusual building for the Station as it is externally lined with corrugated galvanised iron, perhaps demonstrating its quick construction and a view that it would have a limited life.

The **Bath Houses** (A11-A12) and **Laundry** (A9) complete the group of face brick buildings. A11 and A12 have pitched gable and sawtooth roofs on the southern side of a triangular courtyard which was formed when the timber Waiting Room and Office (A5) that formerly stood between the two groups of buildings, was demolished. A **Tank House** raised above floor level joins the two Bath Houses separating the 1st class and 3rd class bathing areas. The **1st class Bath House** (A12) contains individual shower/dressing cubicles whereas the **3rd class Bath House** (A11) contained open plan changing areas and rows of showers (now removed). The funicular system extended into this building collecting clothes for treatment.

The brick **Laundry** (A9) stands at the southeastern end of the group. It has a gabled roof and retains an almost intact interior with equipment demonstrating cleansing processes of the time. This building was also serviced by the Funicular, evident in the height of door thresholds above ground level (with no external steps), suggesting that the doors are at the height of the Funicular carriages.

One other small building survives in the Precinct, a reinforced concrete **Switch Room** (A46) on the northern edge of the group. It has a steel door and retains elements of its switchboard. The date of its construction is not known.

The **Wharf** (L5), **Luggage Sheds** (A14-A17), **Autoclaves** (A7), **Boiler House** (A6), **Bath Houses** (A11-A12) and **Laundry** (A9) are robust masonry structures in generally sound condition. There is termite damage to timber components such as joinery and roof carpentry, settlement, rising damp and marine borer damage to the wharf piles. The internal fittings all show evidence of corrosion of the various metal components due to the nature of the materials and the marine environment.

Other features of the Precinct are:

Funicular Railway System (L20b, L20c)

The rails of the former 2ft 4in (70cm) narrow gauge railway track system are discontinuous in areas where they have disintegrated due to corrosion or where they have been removed. There is however sufficient evidence of their location to clearly indicate the operation of the railway system. The Funicular Railway provided tram access up the sandstone escarpment from the Wharf Precinct to the 1st/2nd Class Precinct and then on to the 3rd Class/Asiatics Precinct. It was constructed in 1912, as part of a suite of capital works recommended by the new Federal Director of Quarantine, Dr W P Norris.

Remnants of rail tracks run along the jetty, branch through the Luggage Sheds (A14-A17), pass through the Autoclaves (A7) and around to the Bath Houses (A11, A12) and Laundry (A9) and then proceed up the escarpment. The remnant escarpment sections are heavily rusted. The original stone ramp to the 'tramway' at the escarpment remains, although the tracks and funicular are discontinuous at two points. The cutting is now heavily overgrown and the original route of the tramway is obscured.

Stone Drains (W6, W7, W8)

Open stone lined drains flanking each side of the valley. Constructed after the 1914-17 building phase they are intact and provide not only drainage but a clear division between the grassed flats and the embankments and escarpment edge.

Fence Lines Past And Present (W9, W10)

Earlier fences divided the site into its various functional areas such as animal pens, while the most recent fence secures the site from water access. The earlier boundary fence linked buildings A6, A7, A8 and A14-A17. It extended from A14-A17 to the escarpment and from A6 to the northern rock line. The present fence is clear of the buildings. This fence is important in securing the site and creating the separation between public space and the Quarantine Station.

Signal Mast (L3)

On the tip of Cannae Point (although physically outside the Precinct boundary) is a tall, wooden signal mast supported by guy wires. First erected in the 1830s, the signal mast was used to advise shipping of the quarantine condition at Spring Cove by the raising of yellow flags. The mast appears to have been rebuilt several times. Other shorter timber flagpoles are located at Quarantine Beach and the Superintendent's Office (A1). Their age and exact function are not known, but they may have been used for ceremonial purposes. The mast was substantially restored and re-rigged in the late 1980s and remains in very good condition. The Cannae Point mast is one of the landscape features related to communications, and stresses the isolation and 'otherness' of the Quarantine Station. It is viewed from a number of locations within the Quarantine Station site. Less dramatic items in the landscape illustrate the same theme, including the Telephone Office (P33). A Conservation Analysis was prepared for the Signal Mast in 1986 prior to its reconstruction.

Pavements

The level ground of the courtyards and surrounds of the buildings of the Wharf Precinct are mostly bitumen paved with some concrete areas.

Significant Plantings

The wharf area is marked by the dominant row of Canary Island Palms which flank the southern stone drain, and by several individual trees located adjacent to the stone funicular ramp. The beach is edged by a row of Flame Trees that mark a change of character between the stark functionality of the main buildings and the more relaxed waterfront.

These are important visual elements that define the nature of the landscape.

Funicular railway system



aerial showing funicular track from the Wharf Precinct to 1st/2nd Class late 1940s



1929



1919

Funicular railway system



1919



2001



2001



2001

2.4 INSCRIPTIONS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

A group of inscriptions of outstanding significance is sited on the rocky outcrops and southeast slope of the Precinct. The inscriptions and memorials are from various dates, although many date from the 20thc. They form a natural gallery on the main access walkway/driveway from the landing stage to the passenger accommodation on the higher ground. Most are intended to be viewed from the pathway. These inscriptions are threatened by the encroachment of vegetation that is apt to cause structural damage in addition to the normal corrosion of the metal plaques and natural erosion of the stone and concrete surfaces. The inscriptions are also threatened by landslips, to which this area is prone.

The 1983 Thorp Analysis also investigated the Cannae Point inscriptions and provided general recommendations for their conservation.

A report on the Wharf Precinct inscriptions was undertaken in March 1999. The recommendations from that report were that:

- *drainage channels be located and cleaned out*
- *small vegetation directly rubbing or causing root damage to engravings be removed by pulling or cutting and applying 'Roundup' to cut stems*
- *soil covering engravings be removed and the affected motif cleaned; selected pittosporums be removed; mowed area be expanded to include Bladley Grass obscuring the site*
- *monitoring of selected sites be implemented*
- *visitor barriers already in place be retained*
- *removal of some of the larger pittosporums growing between the date palms be undertaken*
- *a press release to canvas a restoration program involving repainting the engravings, followed by the instigation of a program be issued*
- *monitoring be commenced and continued every five years*

These issues are set out in the Head Policy for Inscriptions in Volume 1

2.5 NATURAL HERITAGE

The Wharf Precinct is formed from a flat highly modified triangular area with rocky naturally vegetated perimeters to the east and the southwest, and the beach and seawall to the northwest.

The rocky slopes provide naturally vegetated areas which provide habitat for a variety of fauna, most particularly reptiles and birds.

The geological formations that make up Cannae Point and the adjacent headland contribute to the significance of the Precinct. The point and the headland make an important contribution to the character of Sydney Harbour and the surviving evidence of quarrying provides evidence of an important exploitation of the natural resource.

The shoreline to the north of Quarantine Beach, within the 1st/2nd Class Precinct, is used by Little Penguins for nesting and water access, and human access along the shore from the beach may disturb their activities.

Cannae Point, although not presently used by Little Penguins, is considered to be potential habitat and human activity in this area would restrict opportunities for colonisation.

The First Cemetery and the verges of the road leading from the wharf have been identified as highly utilised Bandicoot foraging habitat.

The roadside drains and other damp areas may provide habitat for the Red Crowned Toadlet.

The value of the adjacent marine precinct has been recognised through its declaration as part of the North (Harbour) Aquatic Reserve, although no marine species are restricted to the immediate area of Quarantine Bay adjacent to the beach.

Surface runoff from the Precinct and from higher areas beyond the Precinct drains across Quarantine Beach and can affect the water quality of Quarantine Bay.

The significance of the flora and fauna in the surviving naturally vegetated areas is considered to be medium as biological processes are intact. The significance of the cleared areas used as foraging habitat is considered high. Cannae Point is considered to be of high significance as potential Little Penguin habitat.

2.6 ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

The Wharf Precinct, including Cannae Point, contains a number of identified sites consisting of middens and a rock shelter containing a burial site.

The beach would also have been used as part of Aboriginal occupation and there are a number of rock shelters above the access road on the southern boundary of the Precinct that may have been used as sleeping platforms.

The endemic vegetation contains species that would have been used as sources for food and medicine.

The burial site is considered to be of the highest significance and other evidence of Aboriginal occupation is of high significance. The landforms that reflect opportunities for use by Aboriginal people are also significant.



rock overhang in the Wharf Precinct that may have been used as a sleeping platform during Aboriginal occupation of the site 2001