

## A Short History of the Collins Flat Site to 1960

The land use of North Head has been dominated by its maritime history and Commonwealth needs for quarantine, defence and police use. Given the importance of inhibiting infectious diseases off ships, the Commonwealth took control of the Quarantine Station on North Head on 5 July 1909.<sup>1</sup> In an era when all cargo and passenger traffic was maritime, it was essential to control diseased vessels and persons away from the port of Sydney. The Quarantine Station occupied most of the North Head land area from 1833<sup>2</sup> to the 1930s and a substantial portion until its closure in 1984. These short historical notes will concentrate on the origins, land use and buildings on the Collins Flat site.

Collins Beach and Collins Flat were named after the Deputy Judge-Advocate of the Colony of New South Wales (1788 – 1791), Captain David Collins of the Royal Marines. Collins was also Secretary to Governor, Captain Arthur Phillip, RN, and later Collins was the principal founder of Hobart and Lieutenant-Governor of Tasmania from 1803 to 1810. Above Collins Beach, just below the present Institute, there is a stone monument now lacking its inscriptions. Previously Collins Beach was thought to have been the site where Governor Phillip was wounded by aborigines in 1790 and the Collins Beach monument was to that effect. More recent scholarship indicates that the actual site was at Manly Cove. On 7 September 1790 Governor Phillip approached a group of aborigines feasting off a whale carcass. Phillip had come by boat and wanted to meet again with Bennelong, who had escaped back to his tribe. The accounts vary, but it is likely an aborigine misinterpreted the Governor's greeting and Phillip received a jagged 12 foot spear into his collarbone and needed six weeks to recover.<sup>3</sup>

North Head was first used for quarantine purposes in 1828 when the ship Bussorah Merchant, carrying smallpox, was detained in Spring Cove. The guards and convicts camped on North Head. Other diseases of concern throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century included cholera, typhoid and influenza.<sup>4</sup> After the Commonwealth assumed control of the Quarantine Station in 1909 it was decided to build a Seamen's Isolation Hospital at Collins Flat to house and treat the ships' crews. A jetty was built near Collins Flat, at Store Beach, to resupply the site and the buildings were constructed between 1916 and 1918. The original Hospital buildings still standing include the four original wards connected to the dining room by a long verandah. Other Hospital buildings included an administrative block, operating room, treatment room, dispensary, storeroom and a kitchen. By the 1930s the buildings had ceased to be used for their original purpose and

were used for other Commonwealth purposes.<sup>5</sup> The front stone wall of Collins Flat was probably built in 1934.<sup>6</sup> The stone wall runs from Spring Cove across the front of Collins Flat, and up the hill through the scrub to near the entrance cottage of the Quarantine Station.

On 11 October 1939 Collins Flat became part of the Commonwealth's North Head Defence Reserve. The Defence Reserve began in 1934 and gradually encroached into the Quarantine Reserve.<sup>7</sup> Coastal artillery guns (9.2 inch) had been constructed on the Pacific side of the reserve from 1935 to 1938 (North Fort).<sup>8</sup> During the War virtually all of North Head (including Collins Flat and the Quarantine area) was used for military purposes, including coastal artillery and for housing soldiers in transit, prisoners-of-war and members of the Australian Womens Army Service. The Quarantine function still continued on the site. The permissive occupancy to the Manly Council for part of North Head for recreation and parks was terminated in March 1940.

During the War North Head was part of a major coastal gunnery network protecting the ports of Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. On North Head the 9.2 inch coastal guns were the principal asset, and the military appreciations written by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Garrison Battalion showed that one concern was that small Japanese parties might succeed in entering the Heads and land at Collins, Store or Quarantine Beaches, providing a secondary avenue of approach onto the guns. Post-War the Army continued to be concerned that ground covering potential landing points near the guns, such as Collins Beach, remained land under Commonwealth control.<sup>9</sup>

The higher land on North Head, later known as North Head Barracks, was initially occupied by the Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Heavy Brigade in 1938. During the War Sydney Fixed Defences was the senior headquarters, commanded by Brigadier A.M. Forbes. The Army's School of Artillery had always been in the Sydney area and had resided at Watsons Bay (South Head) since 1895. During the War various Artillery Schools were located at Watsons Bay, Middle Head, Randwick and Holsworthy. Major General Whitelaw decided to re-amalgamate the School of Artillery on one site and the Schools began moving into North Head in June 1945.<sup>10</sup> The School of Artillery remained at North Head from 1945 to 1997 and the National Artillery Museum (North Fort) continues in occupation.

During the War a major camp, Parkhill Camp, was established near Manly Hospital on Blue Fish Drive, near its junction with Darley Road. The camp housed the garrison troops (probably one hundred or more) who provided local defence and protection on North Head.<sup>11</sup> Other troops (such as the gunners and fortifications staff) were housed in the Artillery Barracks and at the Quarantine Station.

The Quarantine Station continued post-War although the rise of airline travel in the 1960s, and the decline in sea transport, reduced the scale of the operation. So too did the changing patterns of disease and new methods of treatment and isolation.<sup>12</sup> After the War the Municipality of Manly gained (or regained) permissive occupancy from the Commonwealth over some areas of North Head for recreation and park purposes. At

Collins Flat the buildings continued to be used by the Army and other Commonwealth departments. From about 1949 to 1953 the Department of Immigration (including Commonwealth Hostels) and the Department of Labour and National Service used the site. Within that period the buildings were refurbished and the site was used as a migrant hostel.<sup>13</sup> The Army resumed occupation on 23 February 1953 and various uses were considered, including accommodation for artillery batteries attached to the School of Artillery and as a potential site for a School of Military Intelligence (eventually sited at Middle Head).<sup>14</sup>

The predecessor of the Australian Federal Police and the Commonwealth Police was the Commonwealth Investigation Service. In 1954, Mr Ray Whitrod, Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Service, suggested at the Commissioners' Conference that an Australian Police College be established for senior officer training for all Australasian jurisdictions.<sup>15</sup> In 1954 Whitrod inspected the Collins Flat site, and by 1955 the Army had confirmed that it was content for another Commonwealth department to utilize the site.<sup>16</sup> The land included the nine acres around the buildings and a further adjoining twelve acres on the ridge extending to Store Beach and the jetty.<sup>17</sup> In 1957 the Cabinet approved the establishment of an Australian Police College, and hence the money for the project. Under the auspices of the Attorney-General's Department, the College was to serve all Australasian jurisdictions by providing senior officer training. The College also provided recruit and advanced training for the Commonwealth Police.<sup>18</sup> In the Cabinet Agendum the Attorney-General Mr Neil O'Sullivan stated:

I believe the establishment of an Australian Police College will contribute greatly to the efficiency of law enforcement officers and the respect accorded the vocation by the community. I think that it is fortunate that the States by seeking high executive training for their Forces will give the college a national character. I am also not unmindful that the opportunities such an institution will afford for collaboration and intercourse between Commonwealth and State Officers will contribute much to a better understanding of their respective problems and areas of responsibility and that an improvement in official relationships will result.<sup>19</sup>

The Army handed over occupation of Collins Flat to Commonwealth Peace Officers on 30 July 1957 and the Attorney-General's Department took control.<sup>20</sup> The initial title of the institution was "Commonwealth Police Training Depot".<sup>21</sup> The Police began refurbishment of the buildings in 1957. The first Principal, Lieutenant Colonel J.F. McCaffrey, was appointed on 12 June 1960 and the Collins Flat buildings were formally opened by the Solicitor General, Sir Kenneth Bailey on 25 October 1960.<sup>22</sup> In October 1961 the Depot was formally renamed the Australian Police College.<sup>23</sup>  
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(1) Commonwealth Gazette, 9 July 1909; Jean Duncan Foley, In Quarantine, Kangaroo Press, 1995, p98.

(2) Ian Charles, Carved into History: Images of Quarantine at North Head, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1988, p8.

- (3) Les C. Wellings, Points and Bays Around Manly, [www.manly.nsw.gov.au](http://www.manly.nsw.gov.au) [accessed 11 May 2004][Wellings was the long-serving Town Clerk of the Municipality of Manly]; “David Collins” in Australian Dictionary of Biography 1788-1850, Melbourne University Press, 1966 (1968 edn), pp236-240; Charles E. McDonald and Captain C.W.T. Henderson, The Manly-Warringah Story, Paul Hamlyn, Dee Why West, 1975, pp17-18.
- (4) NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Information – Quarantine Station (Brochure), August 2003.
- (5) Foley, op.cit., pp103-104, 124; NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney Harbour National Park: Quarantine Station: Draft Conservation Plan, August 1987, pp17, 32. The jetty was probably built in 1917 [Australian Archives (hereafter AA) A1928, Item 876/29, Director to Chief Quarantine Officer, Sydney, 11 September 1917]. A document valuing the buildings in 1955 gave the buildings’ completion date as 1918 [AA SP857/11, Item PS/412, Director of Works to Deputy Director Department of Health Sydney, 24 March 1955].
- (6) AA SP 857/3, Item PC/143 Part 1, Chief Quarantine Officer (General) to The Works Director Sydney, 10 October 1934
- (7) Commonwealth Gazette, 12 October 1939 reduced the boundaries of the Quarantine Station and correspondingly increased the area of the Defence Reserve. The Defence Reserve was established in 1934. The Commonwealth had granted Manly Council permissive occupancy over parts of North Head for parks and recreation on 8 January 1931 but that arrangement was cancelled on 31 August 1934 because of the Defence Reserve. Alternate areas were subsequently negotiated. [AA SP857/3, Item PC 143/Part 1: Letter to Municipality of Manly of 31 July 1934, Department of Health Memorandum of 10 October 1934]
- (8) Roy H.E. Harvey, North Head Battery: A Brief History, RAA Historical Society, North Fort, Manly, 1991, pp3-7.
- (9) AA SP 553/1, Item 59, “Proposed Beach Defence Plan, Section Narrabeen to North Head, including Close Defence North Head Fortress Area” (by 2<sup>nd</sup> Garrison Battalion, 17 August 1940), p3; AA SP 857/11, Item PS 412, HQ Eastern Command to Army HQ, 28 September 1954.
- (10) Ian Burch (ed.), History of the School of Artillery 1885 to 1996, School of Artillery, Manly, 1996, pp11-12, 44-63, 66-71.
- (11) AA SP 553/1, Item 103, [Map] “Appendix B – Plan to accompany Close Defence Scheme” (7<sup>th</sup> Garrison Battalion)
- (12) Foley, op.cit., p129.

- (13) AA SP 857/10, Item PR 2399, Secretary Department of Labour and National Service to Department of the Interior, 27 February 1951 and Department of Works and Housing Drawing of 9 September 1949.
- (14) AA SP 857/11, Item PS/412 generally, and specifically HQ Eastern Command to Army HQ, 28 September 1954.
- (15) Vivienne O'Callaghan, "Genesis of a Police College: A Short History", The Bridge, August 2000, p14; Ray Whitrod, Before I Sleep: Memoirs of a Modern Police Commissioner, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2001, p97.
- (16) AA SP 857/11, Item PS/412, Assistant Secretary (Administration) Attorney-General's Department to Department of the Interior, 5 August 1955.
- (17) AA SP 857/11, Item PS/412, HQ Eastern Command to Army HQ, 28 September 1954 and accompanying Trace Q (area required by Commonwealth Investigation Service).
- (18) AA SP 857/11, Item PS/412, Secretary Attorney-General's Department to Secretary, Department of the Treasury, 29 May 1957, enclosing Cabinet Minute Decision No. 708 (GA) of 10 April 1957.
- (19) AA SP 857/11, Item PS/412, Cabinet Submission by the Attorney-General, 8 March 1957, p5.
- (20) AA SP 857/11, Item PS /412, HQ Eastern Command to Army HQ, 10 August 1957. The 'Completion Return', evidencing the acquisition of the Collins Flat site and buildings by the Attorney-General's Department (dated 28 June 1957) is framed and hangs in the AIPM Dining Room.
- (21) AA SP 857/11, Item PS/412, Cabinet Minute Decision No. 708 (GA) of 10 April 1957, paragraph 1.
- (22) "History of the AIPM", [www.aipm.gov.au](http://www.aipm.gov.au) (accessed 12 May 2005)
- (23) Papers held by AIPM.