

# Matiu/Somes Island animal quarantine station

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*Matiu/Somes Island was recognised as an ideal place to quarantine animals and was formally designated for the quarantine of livestock in 1889. By 1908 it had become one of the country's principal quarantine facilities. In 1968 a purpose-built maximum-security facility was constructed but changes in technology soon rendered it obsolete. The station was closed in 1995.*

## 1889—Matiu/Somes Island designated for quarantine of stock

New Zealand's pastoral industries are vulnerable to diseases carried by imported livestock; measures were introduced to prevent outbreaks of disease from the earliest days of the colony. Matiu/Somes Island was briefly used to quarantine sheep in

1853 but no permanent arrangements were put in place for another 40 years. In 1889 the island was designated as a quarantine station and in 1893 the newly-established Department of Agriculture set up a stock facility on the island. The station was one of the country's two principal stock facilities; the other was on Quail Island in Lyttelton Harbour.

Figure 1. An oblique aerial view of the buildings and structures of the animal quarantine station in 1995. The island has been extensively reshaped since the 1870s as new buildings and other infrastructure were added to or replaced. The line of the old tramway from the jetty to the quarantine station above is visible. (Photographer: Kevin Jones, Department of Conservation.)



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New measures to control disease were introduced in the Australian colonies at about the same time.

The Department of Agriculture shared the island with the health authorities responsible for human quarantine. The two sets of facilities existed side by side for many years. Accommodation blocks and other buildings were established on the island for human quarantine in 1872. The facilities were upgraded and extended in 1918-19 and were maintained until World War II (1939-45) but were little used. The accommodation blocks were used in both World Wars to house interned enemy aliens.

Two buildings particularly associated with the animal quarantine station are the caretaker's cottage and the stables. The cottage was built in 1915, with additions in 1938, and remained in use as a dwelling until about 1968-74. The stables were built in 1916 by internees for the Department of Agriculture. The building is an L-shaped structure with four

double sectioned doors, a gabled roof, and a roof vent. A 130 metre long tramway was built in 1919 to carry supplies from the jetty to the central part of the island.

### **1968—Maximum-security animal quarantine station**

The station was built around the large maximum-security building that sits on a concrete pad within a fenced compound. The building contains numerous holding pens and was fully self-contained. In close proximity are garages, haysheds, and other utility buildings. A number of houses were built to accommodate the staff of the facility. Further away, the settling ponds near the lighthouse were also built as part of the complex. An ova transplant facility was added later to exploit in-vitro fertilisation techniques but this technology rendered the need for quarantine obsolete and the station closed in 1995. Since then the Department of Conservation has managed the island.

Figure 2. Bull being transported in a crate (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry).

