

Heritage Parks of Moreton Bay

Park guide



Military fortifications, quarantine station and historic prison—our colonial past.

Explore our Heritage Parks of Moreton Bay

Moreton Bay and its islands boast a fascinating past from Fort Lytton’s military fortification and quarantine station to St Helena Island’s penal establishment.

Discover more of our colonial past on a guided tour of these unique heritage sites.

Fort Lytton National Park

Fort Lytton National Park protects remnants of a colonial coastal fortress and quarantine station. Located on the southern bank of the Brisbane River, 18km downstream from the city of Brisbane, this site played a strategic military role as a hidden fortress guarding the developing Brisbane colony against attacks from enemy ships. A quarantine station also operated here preventing diseases spreading to a thriving population.

A coastal fortress—Brisbane’s frontline defence

Fort Lytton holds a pivotal place in Queensland’s military history. It was built in 1881 as a strategic fortification and military training base to protect Brisbane from foreign aggression.

The pentagonal-shaped fort with its grassy parapets is a unique piece of nineteenth century military architecture. It is the only fortress in Australia surrounded by a water-filled moat. Located near the mouth of the Brisbane River, it was designed to support underwater river mines and prevent attacks on Brisbane’s port facilities by enemy ships.

The Australian colonies were part of the powerful British Empire, whose colonial ambitions frequently brought it into conflict with many other expanding European empires. Based on the advice from the illustrious British military engineers Jervois and Scratchley, Queensland opted to rely heavily on Fort Lytton as a fixed defence position for its wealthiest port and capital—Brisbane. At the time the fort was built, 1881, Brisbane’s population was less than 100,000, but had a wealthy annual trade worth more than £4,000,000.



Anti-submarine boom at the mouth of the Brisbane River in 1943. Twin 6 pounder guns located at Fort Lytton covered the boom from enemy ships.

Initially, Fort Lytton had four heavy gun positions—two to fire down the river and two to fire across the river. The guns were positioned to support an underwater mine system, which was laid across the river in times of emergency, and to engage enemy vessels as they entered the river. The controlled minefield was operated from a concealed tunnel under the fort. The tunnel was built in the early 1890s and can still be visited today.

By the turn of the 20th century, Fort Lytton’s armaments had increased to six heavy guns and two machine-guns. The main ordnance was two six-inch, five-ton, breech-loading Armstrong guns. These so-called “disappearing” guns could be raised rapidly to fire over the fort’s ramparts and quickly lowered below the parapet just 20 seconds later. Two six-pounder quick-firing Hotchkiss guns, a four-barrel one-inch Nordenfelt machine gun and a ten-barrel 0.45-inch Nordenfelt machine gun supported the heavy armament. Two 64-pounder muzzle-loading guns were sited in an auxiliary position closer to the river.

Queensland’s defence force started out with volunteers in 1860, and by the mid 1880s had expanded to include a small group of permanent soldiers, a militia and a volunteer component. Fort Lytton was the main training ground for the southern companies of the defence force. These annual camps were run by permanent defence staff and provided the only continuous training for part-time soldiers. In the early years the camps were a highlight of Queensland’s political and social calendar.

Thousands of Brisbane's citizens would travel by train or boat to Lytton to watch the spectacular military manoeuvres and ceremonial displays. By the time of Federation, Queensland was able to contribute a well-trained military force for defence of the new nation.

Throughout World War I Fort Lytton continued as the primary defensive position for the port of Brisbane. During World War II the main defences for Brisbane were artillery batteries on Moreton and Bribie islands. Fort Lytton retained its role as a major training facility during the war and provided the last line of control for all shipping entering the river. It played a significant role in protecting Brisbane from air attack and as a signals relay station for the south-west Pacific campaigns. By the end of the war the site had been in use for 65 years. It no longer met defence needs and was gradually abandoned.

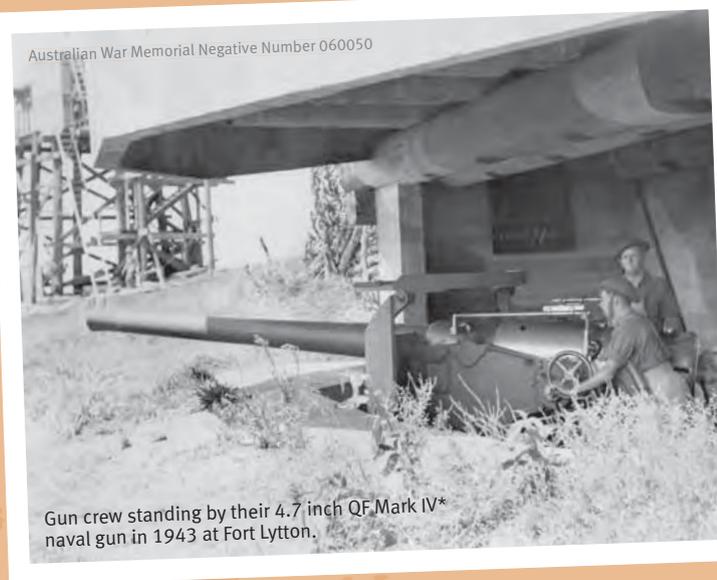
In 1963 the land was included in property obtained by the petroleum company Ampol (now Caltex) to build an oil refinery. Ownership of the Fort Lytton site was transferred to the Queensland Government in 1988 as part of Bicentennial festivities. Although Ampol had

carefully maintained the site, and with growing public interest in heritage places, the fort developed a high profile as an historic site under the management of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS).

Lytton Quarantine Station—protected our city from disease

With increasing fear of disease being introduced to main population centres, a number of quarantine stations were built in the late 1800s on islands off the Queensland coast. These included Peel, St Helena and Stradbroke islands in Moreton Bay.

Queensland depended heavily on primary production and animal products therefore it was essential to quarantine all livestock. In June 1889, 7815m² at Lytton was proclaimed for the purposes of quarantine. Livestock arriving on ships were quarantined here before being allowed to enter Queensland. With the fear of a rabies outbreak in the early 1900s, all dogs arriving on ships were also quarantined and housed with cattle. Two years later as dog numbers increased, an additional 1ha was added to the reserve with a fenced yard for 12 kennels. Little remains of this Animal



Gun crew standing by their 4.7 inch QF Mark IV* naval gun in 1943 at Fort Lytton.

Stock Quarantine Reserve, now in the grounds of the Caltex oil refinery near the park's entrance.

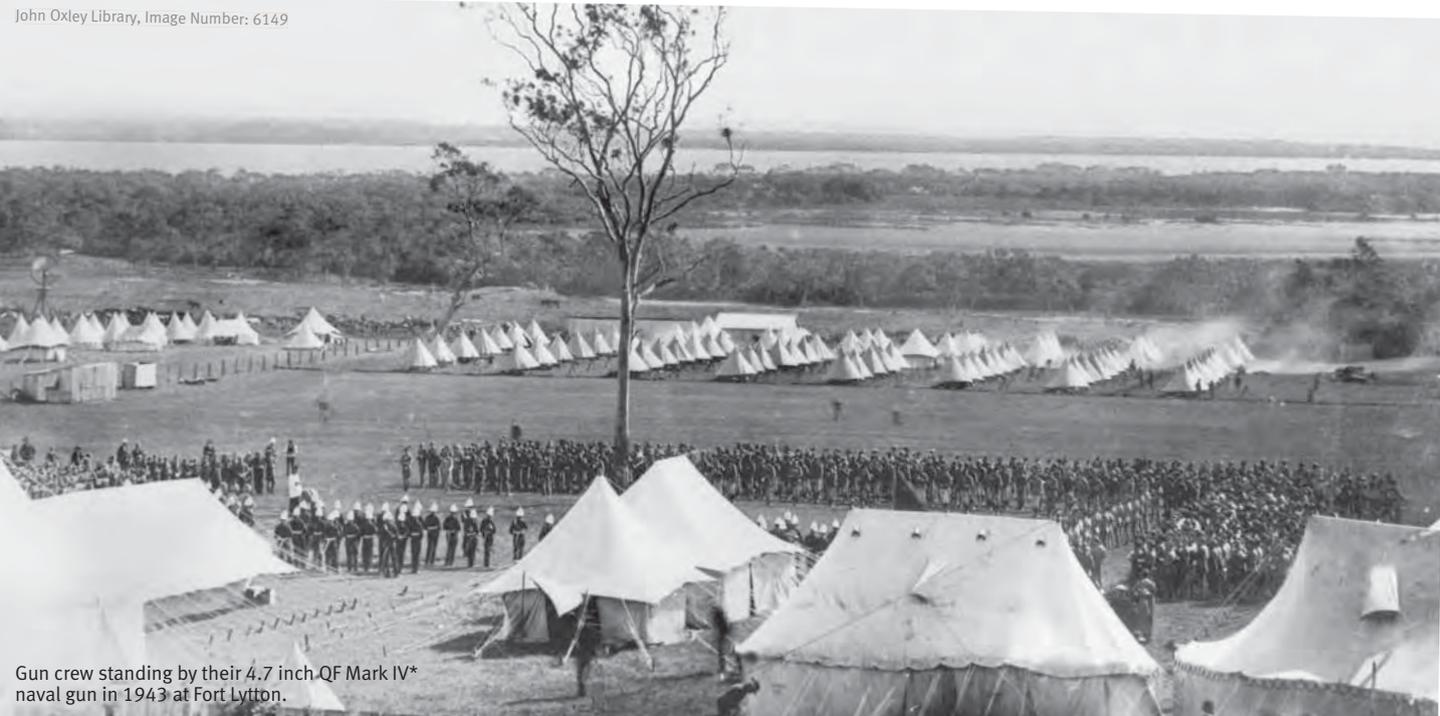
In 1899, the Government resumed all private land in Lytton for a defence zone—a portion of the land was designated for the establishment of a Quarantine Station.

Lytton Quarantine Station was officially opened in 1915 to isolate infected ships, people, animals and goods before being allowed to proceed to Brisbane.

Many of the buildings remain, however some original buildings have been removed since its closure in 1982. The reception house, bath house, disinfecting block, boiler house, blacksmith shed, laundry block, dining hall, doctors' quarters and launchmen's cottages can still be seen. Remnants of the jetty and the tramline which linked the buildings making it easier to move clothing and goods still exist.

The original dining hall was removed from the site around 1988 and used as a fire and rescue training centre. It was returned in 2002 and is currently used as a conference and training centre. This building is available for hire. For enquiries contact the park during office hours.

John Oxley Library, Image Number: 6149



Gun crew standing by their 4.7 inch QF Mark IV* naval gun in 1943 at Fort Lytton.

Planning your trip to Fort Lytton

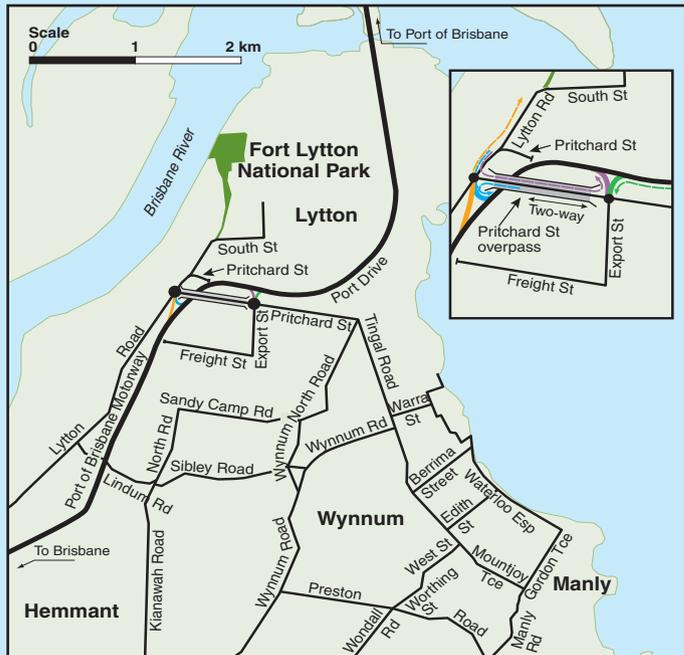
Getting there

Fort Lytton National Park is at Lytton on the southern bank of the Brisbane River.

From central Brisbane, travel east along the Port of Brisbane Motorway and take the Lytton Rd/Pritchard Street exit. Proceed through the lights onto Lytton Road then veer left continuing along Lytton Road to the park entrance. From Wynnum, drive west to the end of Tingal Road, take second exit on around-about onto Pritchard Street and proceed over the overpass. At the lights turn sharp right onto Lytton Road then veer left continuing along Lytton Road to the park entrance.

Opening hours and tours

Fort Lytton is open to the general public on Sundays only: from 10am to 4pm. Bookings are not required for general entrance, unless a specific time slot for a tour is required. First tour: 10.30am. Last tour: 2.15pm. Groups can book weekday tours by contacting the park office on (07) 3393 4647.



Legend

- National park
- Water
- Moat
- Sealed minor road
- Unsealed road
- Traffic lights
- Fence
- Historical structures
- Old quarantine station structures
- 1 Reception house
- 2 Bath house
- 3 Disinfecting block
- 4 Boiler house
- 5 Blacksmith shed
- 6 Laundry block
- 7 Dining hall
- 8 Doctor's quarters
- 9 Garage
- 10 Launchmen's cottage
- 11 Launchmen's cottage
- 12 Quarantine jetty
- P Parking
- ♿ Toilets
- ⛱ Sheltered picnic area
- i Information

- Motorway off-ramp to Fort Lytton (or industrial area)
- Motorway on-ramp back to Brisbane
- Motorway on-ramp to Port of Brisbane
- Motorway off-ramp to Fort Lytton (or industrial area)



Facilities

A picnic area is provided for visitors. Open fires are not permitted. Please bring a gas or fuel stove for cooking.

Wheelchair-accessible toilets are available, but the grass pathways make the use of wheelchairs or strollers difficult.

Caring for our heritage parks

To preserve the area and historic ruins for generations to come, please follow these guidelines while visiting any of our heritage parks:

- In order to preserve the historic sites, access to some areas is restricted. Access to the restricted area is by guided tour only. Fines apply for entering these areas without a tour guide.
- Barricades protect structures and visitors. Please stay behind them.
- The ruins are fragile. Please avoid sitting, standing, leaning or touching any structures, as the rock work crumbles easily.
- Everything in the national park is protected—do not take or interfere with plants, animals or structures.
- Domestic animals are not allowed. People who bring their pets will be asked to leave.
- Take your rubbish home—no bins are provided.
- Fishing is not permitted at Fort Lytton and St Helena Island. Consult the Moreton Bay Marine Park user guide for fishing restrictions around St Helena Island.
- Use fuel or gas stoves—open fires are not permitted.
- Camping is not permitted in any heritage national park.



Firing of historic 64 pounder guns at Fort Lytton.

Emergency contacts

Ambulance

non-emergency
13 12 33

life-threatening emergencies

000 (medical, fire, police)
or if no reception on mobile
phone try 112



For your safety

By following a few simple steps you can make your visit safe and enjoyable.

- Stay on designated tracks, behind safety barriers and avoid walking during wet weather as tracks can be slippery.
- Wear boots or sturdy shoes.
- Supervise your children at all times especially near water and drop offs.
- Tell family or friends of your plans and inform them if these change.



- Carry adequate drinking water, food, a first aid kit and mobile phone.
- Protect yourself from the elements—wear protective clothing to avoid bites, scratches and sunburn.
- Boil or treat water before use.
- Never feed or leave food for animals—human food can harm wildlife and cause some animals to become aggressive.
- Observe and comply with all danger and warning signs.



Legend

- Walking tracks
- ++ Site of old tramway
-  Forest
-  Mangrove
-  Moreton Bay
-  Restricted public access
-  Unrestricted public access
-  Historic sites/ruins
-  Tables
-  Toilets
-  Shelter shed
-  Information
-  No camping
-  Domestic animals prohibited

Planning your trip to St Helena Island

Access

The south-western corner of the island is open to the public without a tour guide. The rest of the island, including the prison ruins, is a restricted access area. Entry is by guided tour only. The park is open during daylight hours. Camping is not permitted on the island.

Getting there

St Helena Island is 7km north-east of Manly and 45min by boat. Commercial tour boats depart from Manly and New Farm. The Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre operates its own service to the island for school groups.

Private boats may moor off the island. Consider the tides when anchoring in shallow water.

Guided tours

Several commercial operators conduct guided tours of St Helena Island. For further information consult the Yellow Pages telephone directory and search under Tourist Attractions.

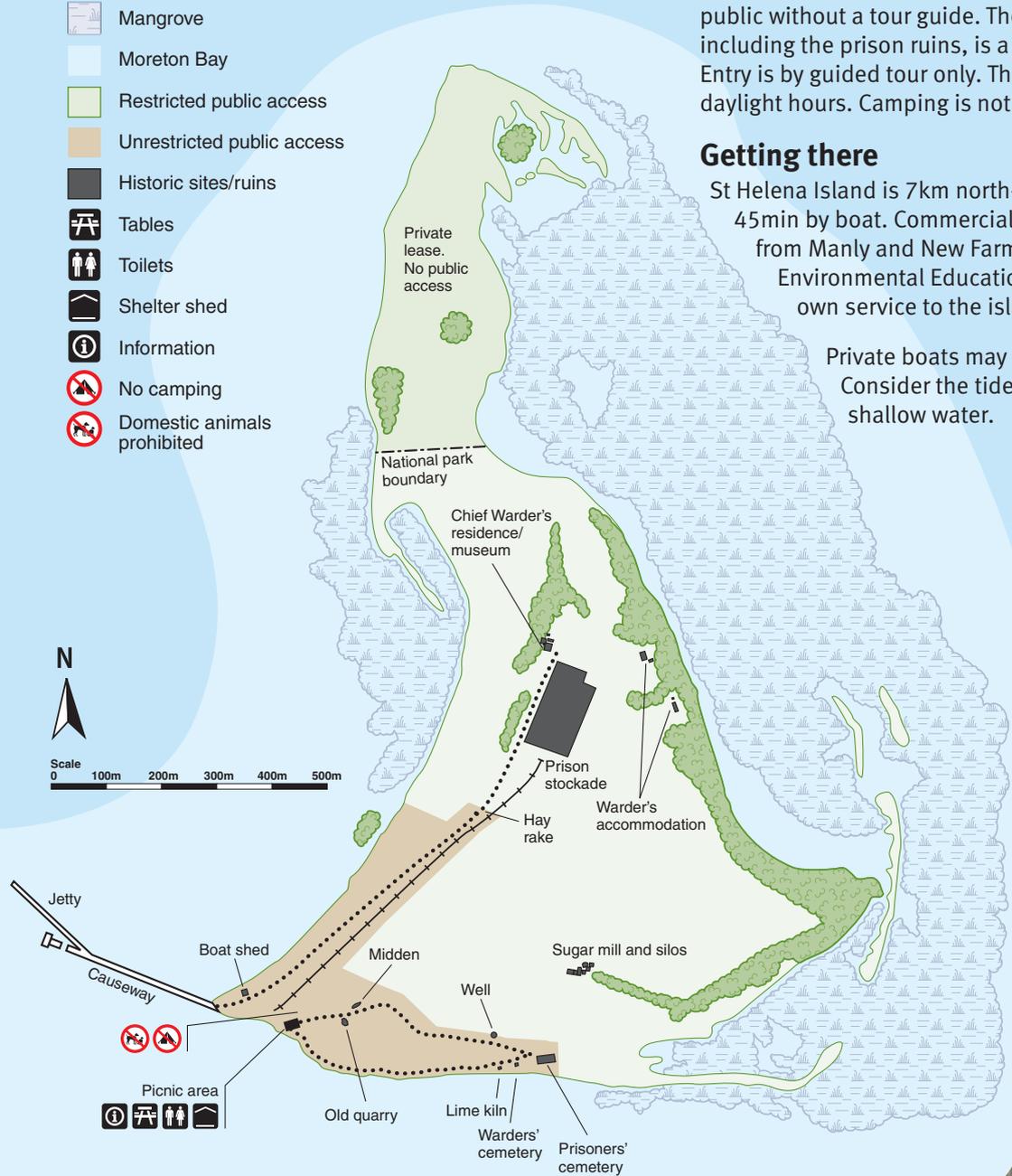
School groups can book educational tours through the Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre.

Ranger-guided tours are available on weekends by appointment only. Fees are charged for all guided tours. For tour information and bookings phone the Queensland Parks and Wildlife (QPWS) office (back page).

Facilities

A picnic area with toilets, picnic tables and a shelter shed is provided at the island's southern end for your use. Information on guided tours, walking tracks and access restrictions is available at the shelter shed.

The park provides limited facilities for wheelchairs and prams. Check with park staff and commercial tour boats for further details.



St Helena prison ruins 2008.

St Helena Island National Park

Located in Moreton Bay 7km north east of Manly, St Helena Island was the first of Queensland's national parks to be managed primarily for its historic values. The park contains the ruins of the State's first penal settlement, which operated from 1867 to 1932.

Island history

Aboriginal middens are evidence that local indigenous people visited the island to gather shellfish and hunt dugong and flying fox long before European settlement.

The island received the name 'St Helena' in 1828. A story is told that an Aboriginal known as 'Napoleon' stole an axe on nearby Stradbroke Island. Like his namesake, Napoleon Bonaparte, he was exiled to an island, which thereafter became known as St Helena. His exile lasted only as long as it took to build a canoe and paddle back.

In the 1850s, a short-lived dugong industry exported dugong oil to England for medicinal purposes. A quarantine station, built in 1866 by prison labour from the prison hulk 'Proserpine', was also short-lived. Few vessels were quarantined before authorities deemed the buildings would be better used to house prisoners from overcrowded jails and hulks.

St Helena Penal Establishment was proclaimed in May 1867 as a high security prison for long-term inmates. In the 1920s, the prison was wound down to function as a prison farm until it closed in December 1932.

Early attempts by the Moreton Bay League to turn the island into a recreation destination were thwarted by the depression years. The Brisbane City Council handed ownership to the Lands Department in 1939, allowing various graziers to lease the land.

In October 1979, the island was gazetted Queensland's first national park, to be conserved as an historic site. Today, the QPWS works toward preserving the ruins and artefacts from further degradation and accurately presenting the park's history to visitors.



Aerial views of St Helena Island taken in 1990.

The prison era

St Helena Penal Establishment was considered a model prison of its time. The superintendent and warders managed a highly disciplined prison, where security was tight and successful escapes were few. Distance and isolation enforced basic self-sufficiency. While this was born of necessity, it also resulted in economic profit.

The prison's early years saw prisoners clearing native vegetation, planting crops and constructing buildings. The island's natural resources were used wherever possible—buildings were constructed from "beachrock" blocks quarried from the southern flats and bricks moulded from island clay mixes. A limekiln, the best remaining example in Australia, was constructed to burn coral for cement. It was built high on the southern shoreline to take advantage of prevailing southerly winds that would blow into the firebox.

Maize and vegetable crops supplemented with meat from farmed sheep and cattle herds provided much of the island's food requirements, including award winning Ayrshire dairy cattle. St Helena was one of the first places to

trial sugarcane and sisal was grown for the production of ropes. Olive oil produced from the island's olive groves also won prizes at the Royal Queensland Show and overseas.

As the prison became established, the range of industries expanded. In the 1870s, trade workshops were erected with many products sold to the mainland. Warders with trade skills trained prisoners to become saddle makers, tinsmiths, boot makers, tailors, blacksmiths and carpenters.

Warders' accommodation varied in style and placement according to their position in the hierarchy. The superintendent occupied a large home with extensive gardens, including a grand coral fountain. Further along "Warder's Row", smaller cottages were home to the wives and children of some warders, while dormitories housed the remaining warders.

The prison decline

Despite its successes, problems emerged. Families were removed from the island in the 1890s. This displeased the warders, who now had to live apart from their families for up to six weeks. The age of the buildings rendered them a fire hazard, while their nineteenth century design did not accommodate new ideas for prisoner reform.

From the 1920s, St Helena became a prison farm. Long-term prisoners were transferred to Brisbane's Boggo Road Gaol while the remaining prisoners dismantled the prison buildings. Many of these building materials were reused in other buildings on the mainland. St Helena was finally closed in December 1932.

Horse-drawn tram with officials on St Helena Island, 1928.

Natural areas

The island's vegetation is a mix of original dry vine forest, remnants of beautifully landscaped gardens and former crops such as olive trees. Mangroves and mud flats surrounding the island provide an essential nursery for juvenile fish, crabs and shellfish. Dolphins, turtles and dugongs can be seen in the bay waters surrounding the island.

St Helena is internationally recognised as an important site for migratory shorebirds. Each summer, hundreds of these birds feed around the shoreline before their marathon flight north. Birds of prey such as kites, ospreys and sea eagles are commonly seen soaring high above the island.

Further information

Visit us on-line at www.npsr.qld.gov.au/parks

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

Fort Lytton National Park and

St Helena Island National Park

Ph: (07) 3393 4647

fax: (07) 3893 1780

Customer Service Centre

Ph 13 QGOV (13 74 68)

Email info@npsr.qld.gov.au

All educational enquiries to:

Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre

Ph: (07) 3906 9111

website: www.moretoneec.eq.edu.au

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*Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service,
Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing.*

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