

'Currajong' at war

'Currajong' has seen many owners and many uses. During World War II it was converted for use as a military hospital.

For 52 years, from 1888 to 1940, 'Currajong' was a gracious gentleman's residence, set in acres of well-kept gardens, facing Fulham Road in the Townsville suburb of Pimlico.

When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, though the theatre of battle was far away, Mr and Mrs Ferguson (then the owners of the property) determined to contribute to the war effort.

They offered 'Currajong' and its surrounding grounds to the Anglican Parish of St Matthew as a home for

refugee children, then being sent from London and other major English cities besieged by German bombing. Tragically the children who were to have lived in the house were on a ship torpedoed on its way to Australia.

War in the Pacific

In December 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and advanced rapidly through the Malaysian Peninsula, overrunning the Philippines and moving into the Dutch East Indies.

Australia was threatened from two directions — the east via the Indies,



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House used for administration at the rear of 'Currajong', about 1944. Note the roof of 'Currajong' visible behind trees on right. Note also the staff car and flagpole in front. Some temporary buildings are on the right.

John Oxley Library



Staff of 3MRS, November 1942.

Back: Dr S. F. M. Yeates, C. C. Greenwell, Sister Godson, Sister Hamilton, – Fullager, –
Front: Sister Cook, Sqn Ldr Hughes, Sister Wheatley, Wg Cdr Fulton, Sister Garner, –, Sister

and the north via New Guinea. By early 1942, as Rabaul and other settlements on the north coast of New Guinea fell before the Japanese advance, it was obvious that north Queensland was in danger. Townsville, the major port and supply centre for the region, was in the front line. Australian and American troops poured into the city, and Townsville became a gigantic military base.

State schools closed for a time, and children were evacuated to what were considered 'safe' areas. Boarding schools such as Townsville Grammar School, St Patricks and St Anne's (now Cathedral School) were required

Medical staff of 20MCS, about 1944

Back: Sqn Ldr Arthur Uglow, Flt Lt Dick Ross, Flt Lt Lindsey Hickingbotham
Front: Flt Lt Jim Riddell, Wg Cdr Don Howle, Sqn Ldr Merv Robinson



to relocate when their buildings were taken over for military use.

Those who did not leave the city were faced with food rationing, water shortage, and restrictions on where they could go. Always one was overwhelmed by the huge numbers of khaki-clad troops in the city.

'Currajong' becomes a hospital

Early in 1942 the Fergusons handed over 'Currajong' to the Royal Australian Air Force. In March it was converted for service as Central Sick Quarters for the squadrons based at Garbutt Airfield.

The rooms at the rear of the house, originally a bedroom and sitting room, were made into one room to form an operating theatre. The archway between the main bedroom and the verandah was enclosed, and the wall between the main and second bedrooms was removed. So, two large wards extended on either side of the hallway. They were used to accommodate dangerously ill patients. The verandah was enclosed with fly screening and blinds, to accommodate seriously ill patients.

The office of the medical officer was in the room screened by louvres at the corner of the front verandah. The verandah room behind was also used as offices. The rooms off the back verandah (now used as store rooms) became a dispensary and a linen room. The garden to the left of the house disappeared under a series of marquee tents with wooden floors, to house less seriously ill patients. Another building was erected closer to Fulham Road to house a Venereal Disease Ward.



Nursing sisters (*left photo*) and orderlies (*right photo*) of 20MCS, about 1944.



Huts for nursing personnel were erected around what had been the croquet green, which served as a parade ground as well as a tennis court and volley ball court. At the rear the coach house and stables became a workshop; ablutions blocks, toilet blocks and a morgue were built.

A mess hut was also built, and other personnel were accommodated in tents.

'Currajong' was the centre of a major and vital facility. On 9 July 1942 the hospital was taken over by No. 3 Medical Receiving Station (3MRS) commanded by Wing Commander J. C. Fulton, with Dr S. F. M. Yeates as medical officer.

Dr Yeates recalled that the first patients received were evacuees from the battle at Milne Bay, where the Japanese were repulsed on land for the first time in their Pacific advance.

Despite Japanese air raids on 26, 27 and 28 July 1942, Townsville remained unscathed. By October 1942 the tide of war in New Guinea was turning, and 3MRS was posted closer to the action

in Port Moresby. 'Currajong' reverted to its former role.

Central Sick Quarters No. 20 (later renamed No. 20 Medical Clearing Station or 20MCS) was formed. Originally it was quartered in open ground across Fulham Road, but moved to 'Currajong' after 3MRS departed in 1943.

In April 1944 3MRS returned to 'Currajong', and the two units were combined.

'Currajong' continued in use as a hospital until October 1944. Later it served as accommodation for WAAAFS, before it was returned to the Fergusons in 1945.

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At last peace returned to 'Currajong'.

This account is based on Unit Diaries and reminiscences of Dr Yeates, Dr Fulton, Mr Hickingbotham, Sister Chauvel and Mrs E. Payne.