

Quarantine Stations

According to British Parliamentary Papers, two separate quarantine stations were built in the north of Mauritius, one at Pointe aux Cannonier and the other on Flat Island. The Flat Island station was reserved exclusively for persons undergoing quarantine for cholera while the one at Cannonier's Point was used for persons undergoing quarantine for any disease or diseases except cholera.

The Quarantine History on Flat Island

Flat Island is located at a distance of around 12 kilometres to the north of Mauritius. It stretches over an area of more than 300 acres and it is the largest islet off the Mauritian coast. During the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, Flat Island was used a quarantine station.

Between 1856 and 1870, numerous stone and wooden buildings and structures, to be used as quarantine station, were erected by ex-indentured labourers at a cost of tens of thousands of pound sterling to the local colonial treasury. These buildings consisted of hospitals, living areas for individuals placed in quarantine, living quarters and offices for medical, police and immigration officials in charge of the quarantine station, kitchens and stores.



Fig 19. Ruins of a building (Source: AGTF Collection)



Fig 20..Ruins of the Kitchen (Source: AGTF Collection)

Fig 21.Ruins of the kitchen (Source: AGTF Collection)

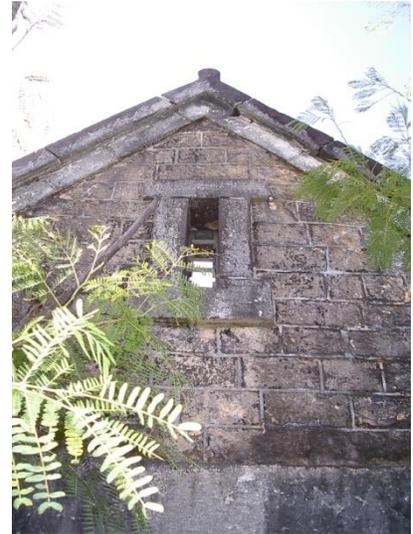


Fig 22.The chimney (Source: AGTF Collection)



Fig 23.Iron furnace in the bricks (Source: AGTF Collection)

Several wells were also dig on the eastern, western and central part of the island for the supply of water. In addition, a small jetty on the eastern side and a long pier on the western side of the island were built. The most famous building on the island is the lighthouse which stands on a 100-meter high hill and became operational during the mid-1850s.



Fig 24.Well (Source: AGTF Collection)



Fig 25.Lighthouse (Source: AGTF Collection)

One of the most eminent visitors to Flat Island was Nicholas Pike, the American Consul in Mauritius, who visited the island in 1870. In his work on Mauritius entitled 'Sub-Tropical Rambles in the Land of the Aphanateryx', which was published in the mid-1870s, he provided an interesting description of the island.

The stone buildings and structures on Flat Island are intimately linked with the history of indenture and indentured labourers in Mauritius. Between the 1850s and early 1900s, thousands of indentured labourers and ex-indentured labourers were placed in quarantine there. At the same time, several hundred indentured and ex-indentured labourers also perished during their stay on that island. The buildings which were erected on Flat Island between 1856 and 1870 were meant mainly to serve as a quarantine station for indentured labourers who recently arrived in Port Louis onboard ships from India and were suspected of being infected with contagious diseases. However, it was also a place where Liberated Africans, British soldiers and some Chinese labourers were also put in quarantine. There are other places around the world which share an almost similar history with Flat Island such as Nelson Island, located off the coast of Trinidad, and Nukulau Island, located off the coast of Fiji. These two islands were also used as quarantine station for indentured labourers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries."

Flat Island is presently under the care of the National Parks & Conservation Services of the Ministry of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security. This islet is covered with wild and planted vegetation, reptiles and birds. No human inhabits the islet except the temporary post of the National Coast guard and occasional tourists' visits.