



# Herries Hospital—Still under threat



Nurse Herries Private Hospital c.1920  
P8832, Cairns Historical Society Collection



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Despite being entered in the Queensland Heritage Register, the former Herries Hospital in Cairns is still under immense threat.

In January 2008, the building was wrapped in black plastic with a sign advising that it is a heritage listed site, is totally unsafe and is uninsured.

Just before Christmas 2005, much of the external cladding of the building was removed, although the place was protected by heritage legislation. Following some action by the Environmental Protection Agency, the works were halted, but it has left the building in a very vulnerable state.

The building is now wrapped in black plastic to offer some protection, but there appears no evidence of any intent to make good.

So why is this place significant? Private hospitals were common in North Queensland until the post-World War II period. They catered for cases that were not severe enough for a public hospital, but their major function was for maternity cases. Matron Herries was much respected as a midwife and mothers-to-be would travel from places such as Mt Garnett and all over the Atherton Tablelands to have their babies in the Herries Hospital.

The building thus has historic and social significance, as it represents a very important aspect of women's health care in once remote areas, and is still remembered with great affection by older people in the Cairns region.

In recent years the building, which is surrounded by holiday apartments, was purchased, ostensibly as a development site, and the decline of the building accelerated.

Amendments to the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* come into force at the end of March 2008. These amendments include some new minimum care provisions. The National Trust will be requesting that the EPA applies these new provisions to this and several other similar cases, to test their effectiveness.

*Stewart Armstrong.*

