

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 30 TO THE DEFENCE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND



The Virtual Visit series was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottnest Island was closed to the public due to social distancing restrictions and periods of use for quarantine from March to June 2020. The intent was to maintain a connection to the Island by exploring stories of interest and offering links for self discovery.

Now that the Island is once again open to visitors and guiding services are being gradually re-established, these Virtual Visits have been

retained as part of an archival record for future

CAPTAIN HUSSEY REMEMBERS (2) A DUCHESS PAST HER PRIME

This Virtual Visit continues with extracts from the short, typed account entitled *Coast Defence Construction in the 1930s*, inscribed “by Brigadier Hussey”. in the Army Museum of Western Australia Archives.



Hussey records that:

“Two old powered barges, the Duchess and the Agnes transported all construction materials from Fremantle to Rottnest unloading them with their own gear. For four weeks, the weather was deemed too rough too risk the passage to Rottnest. Finally, the Duchess (which had been swamped and sunk on one return trip) was able to transport the guns (each barrel weighed 30 tons) and unload them using the gantry crane.”

It was then that the problem with the winch hook and eyes of the lifting sling were discovered. (Refer to Virtual Visit 28). There were no construction issues with the gantry crane itself, as it had undergone a trial erection in Perth before disassembly and transport to Rottnest. One pier on the jetty and one on the dolphin enabled the

barges to be positioned directly underneath the gantry and components to be lifted directly from barge to rail.



Unloading Rottneest salt from the old Swan River ferry steamer Duchess, now converted into a barge, near the traffic bridge, Fremantle. The concerns regarding the weather proved well founded as the Duchess was later to founder (sink) in the approaches to Fremantle Harbour with a 35 ton load of blue metal for Rottneest defence construction.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/32846039/2875873>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/85594734?searchTerm=barge%20Duchess>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/85591628?searchTerm=barge%20Duchess>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/85591160?searchTerm=barge%20Duchess>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/25132699?searchTerm=barge%20Duchess>

In a more glamorous period of her career, the Duchess traversed the Swan River between Barrack Street and the Mend Street Jetties including conveying Royal visitors in 1901. After 29 years of service, the Duchess made her last ferry trip in 1927.

You can read more about Rottnest and Swan River ferries when the new RVGA Digital Archive goes on-line shortly. Just use the pull down index TRANSPORT Ferries. Watch for the activation email.

