

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 32 TO THE 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.

Now that the Island is again open to visitors, these Virtual Visits are continuing in 2021 to enable a further enjoyment of stories introduced at the Wadjemup Museum, the Chapman Archives or sites around the Island.

Enjoy, reflect and share.

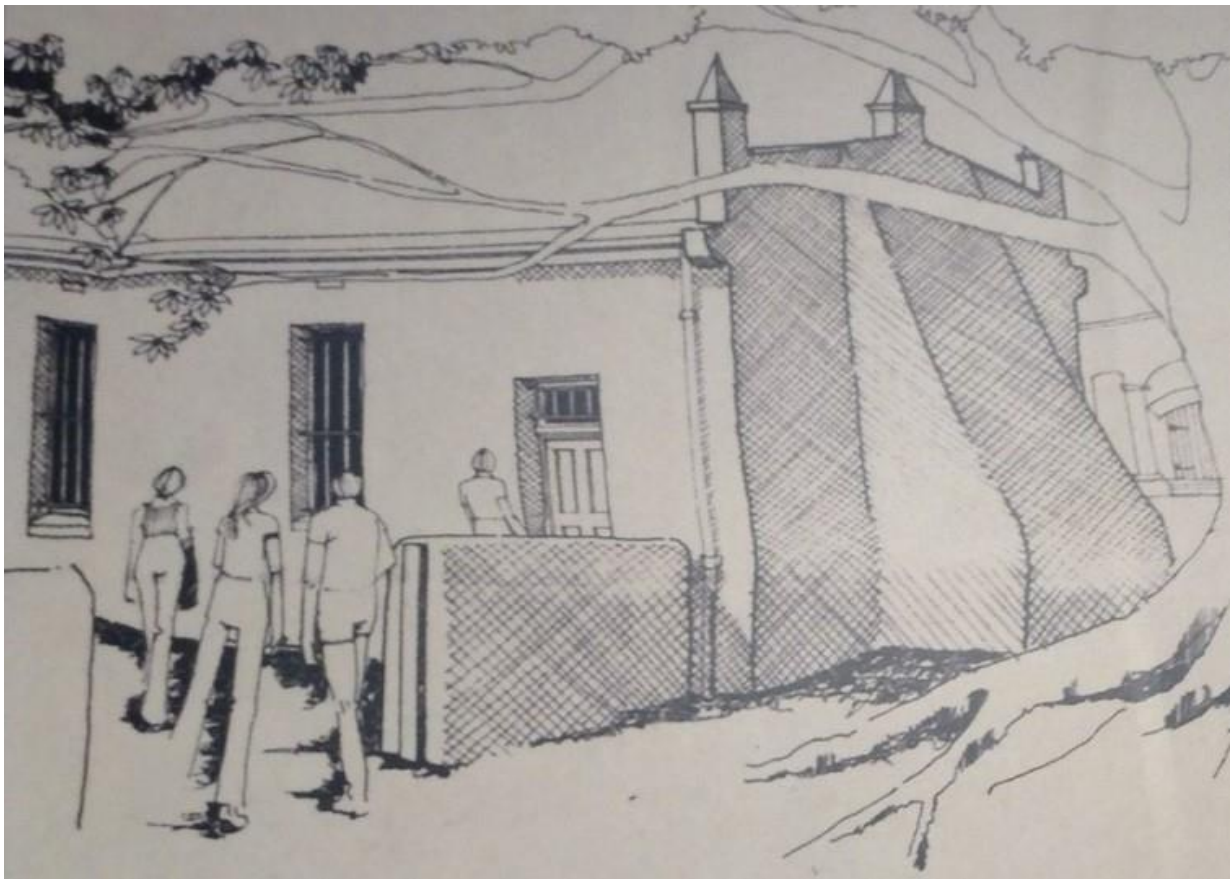
ROTTNEST FERRY – THE ZEPHR



The first object seen, after the welcome signage, on entry to the Wadjemup Museum is the bow scroll of the SS Zephyr which served as a ferry to Rottnest between 1907 and 1952. On loan from the Western Australian Museum, the carved scroll was found in a shed in Fremantle in 1975 and restored to its original condition by Peg and Roy Retchford.



From a postcard – Twin screw SS Zephyr at 14 knots on the Swan River



Although the bow scroll has been in its present location for a number of years, its new prominence is due to the changed and enhanced entrance arrangements at the North end of the Hay Store. The decked area provides universal access in a shaded location away from traffic at the Bus Stop. Interestingly, as another exhibit in the Museum shows, the new entrance returns to the location proposed but never utilised for the initial 1975 Museum opening.



“Original condition” is another concept and decision point faced by curators and conservators as the bow scroll had been repeatedly painted during the service life of the Zephyr. The earliest photographic evidence supports the colour version although any version could be considered “authentic”.



The Zephyr was designed by Walter Reeks, of Pitt Street, Sydney and built in 1906 by Mr R. Davis, Blackwall, Brisbane Water, NSW, for McIlwraith & McEacharn & Company of Melbourne, Victoria, for service as an excursion vessel in Western Australia. She was first registered at Fremantle on 8 June 1906 Her registered tonnage was 177.83 gross registered tons; 41.97 tons. Her wooden hull was carvel built; with a broad transom stern, 4 bulkheads, possibly 1 watertight bulkhead, and 3 non-watertight. Her length was 38.5 metres with a beam of 8.7 metres and a draft of 2.5 metres. She carried 1 mast and her machinery was 2 sets of triple expansion steam engines, built by Campbell & Calderwood, Paisley, Glasgow in 1905, with 2 x 25.4 cm, 2 x 40.6 cm and 2 x 66 cm bore cylinders and a 45.7 cm stroke, producing 500 hp, driving her, via twin screws at 13 knots.



Variations of the McIlwraith & McEacharn House flag can be seen proudly flying from the Zephyr which enjoyed wide popularity as an excursion vessel for annual picnics river and coastal excursions including Rottneest.

In her positioning voyage across the Australian Bight where, in spite of bagged coal on the decks, it was rumoured she had to burn some of her interior furnishings to reach Albany. Another of her famous journeys was also to Albany. in September 1908, when she made a 74 hour voyage to Albany from Fremantle for excursion trips both within and outside Princess Royal Harbour during the visit of 16 ships of the American Great White Fleet who were doing a world-wide voyage. She arrived Albany on 4 September and remained there until the 19th and then returned to Fremantle.



At the start of World War 2, Zephyr was requisitioned as an Examination Vessel from 2 September until 30 November 1939. According to the publication "Australian Army Watercraft: The Unknown Fleet", Zephyr then became an army vessel with the designation AV6G4. At the end of WW II she was returned to Mcllwraith & McEacharn, and until October of 1946 remained in commercial service. On 11 October 1946 she passed into the hands of Alf E Tilley & Co, Beach Street, Fremantle and continued on in the Rottnest Island service.

With the inroads of the new post war, high speed ferries appearing on the Rottnest run, Zephyr, who by this time was feeling her age, was placed on the Garden Island run from the 1953 season until retirement in 1964. She was then moored at Coffee Point but in May, 1965 was discovered sitting on the river bottom with her upper deck awash. When she was raised, six neat holes were discovered drilled into her hull just below the water line. After dismantling at the Harvest Road jetty at North Fremantle the hull was towed to Careening Bay, Garden Island and burnt on the beach for the salvage of her brass and copper fittings.

If, after your visit to the Wadjemup Museum, you want to delve deeper into the story of SS Zephyr, then a Google search will provide a range of links to articles and photographs.

<https://www.facebook.com/LostPerth/photos/zephyr's-rotnest-trips-the-ss/971812976223090/>

<https://www.maritimeheritage.org.au/documents/MHA%20September%202005%20Journal.pdf>

https://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa_b2193007_1

<http://ammpt.com.au/distant-lens-age-invention/>

<https://www.abebooks.com/9781876043155/Australian-Army-Watercraft-Australias-unknown-1876043156/plp>

When it goes online early this year, the RVGA Chapman Archive will provide access to a range of digitised clippings and photographs under the TRANSPORT / Ferries category. The Golden Whistler index uses the same classification methodology and is currently available on the Members section of the RVGA website.



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