

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 41 TO THE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND



The Virtual Visit series was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottneest 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.

HIGHLANDERS AND LOWLANDERS ON ROTTNEST

The first Scottish settlers arrived in Australia with the First Fleet in 1788, including three of the first six Governors of New South Wales, John Hunter, Lachlan Macquarie and Thomas Brisbane. Scots however constituted only 5% of the convict population. The Scottish courts were unwilling to punish crimes deemed to be lesser offences in Scots Law by deportation to Australia. Most transported Scots were convicted of minor property offences and represented a broad cross-section of Scotland's working classes. As such, they brought a range of useful skills to the colonies. The same circumstances applied during the Western Australian convict period.

The name Perth itself is of course Scottish. It was chosen in 1829 by the future Governor of the newly proclaimed colony of Western Australia, Captain James Stirling, who was born in Drumpellier, North Lanarkshire. Of the names of the 361 suburbs located to date in the Perth-Rockingham-Mandurah Metropolitan area, 73 (20%) can be found in Scotland, or are based on Scottish family names or connected with Scotland in other ways. Of course, many of the names are used in other parts of the British Isles as well, but 36 of them (10%) are unique to Scotland or are readily identifiable with places in Scotland that are based on the same names.



A substantial and concrete link with Scotland and Rottneest exists in the form of a firebrick stamped J&M Craig, Kilmarnock currently in the Rottneest Island Authority collection. These specialised bricks were either shipped to order for particular purposes or constituted ballast on outgoing voyages from Glasgow. Unfortunately, the provenance of this brick on Rottneest is not known although it most likely came from the Governor's Residence, now the Hotel.



Another Scottish connection was the 21st Regiment of Foot, the Royal North British Fusiliers. ["North British" was the politically correct form of "Scottish" or "Scots" used by the British Army from 1713 to 1877]. The Regiment arrived in Australia through detachments in charge of convicts sent to the east coast penal colonies between 1832 and 1833. It was then stationed in Tasmania, with detachments in Perth and Swan River in Western Australia until 1839, when it proceeded to India. Future wartime Prime-Minister, Winston Churchill, served as commanding officer 6th (Service) Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1916. The unit is perpetuated today within the Royal Regiment of

Scotland

A walking trail marks the presence of the most famous Scottish couple on Rottneest, Robert and Caroline Thomson, the first family to live on Rottneest Island and whose name was given to the island's main bay. The **Gabbi Karniny Bidi** self-guided walk and the **Lakes Walk** offered by the Rottneest Voluntary Guides take walkers in part through the land Thomson and his family farmed in the 1830s and past the well he built, the oldest man-made structure on the island.



Thomson, his wife Caroline and eight of their 12 children arrived in Western Australia on one of the first ships carrying settlers in 1829. In 1831, he moved to Rottneest, seemingly in mortal dread of mainland Aboriginals. He was given 80.5ha on the island,

including two town allotments. Their 33ha inland farm stretched from Serpentine Lake, through to the salt works to somewhere above Oliver Hill Fort north of Lake Baghdad.

The Thomson family stayed on Rottneest for eight years until the Island become a jail for Aboriginal prisoners. Caroline died in Mandurah in 1863 and Robert decided to visit his daughter in Adelaide and his son, who had taken up land on Kangaroo Island. While on the island, Thomson, aged 72, died of fever on 11 January 1865. *[It should be noted that there are conflicting versions of Robert Thomson's Scottish connections and gentility].*

The Army provides another link to Scotland through 16 Battalion, the Cameron Highlanders, The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia has a photograph album containing many images of the battalion's training camps on Rottneest between 1936 and 1940. The photographs show the extent to which Scottish traditions (including dress, food, drink, music and dance) were part of Regimental tradition and daily routine on Rottneest.



Traditional Burns' Supper and the Address to the Haggis

Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,
Great chieftain o' the pudding-race!
Aboon them a' yet tak your place,
Painch, tripe, or thairm:
Weel are ye wordy o'a grace
As lang's me arm.

Photo Below: Impromptu Highland Reel on the transport back to Fremantle



Royal ensign of the King of Scots flying at the flagpole by the Battalion Guard tent at the entrance to Airfield Camp.

[See also Virtual Visit 32 for the flag frequently flown as the house flag of McIlwraith & McEacharn & Company on the ferry Zephyr]

The Chapman Archives currently has only 2 references to 16 Battalion or Cameron Highlanders. Please contact the RVGA Archivist if you have relevant materials

archives@rvga.asn.au

LINKS FOR SELF DISCOVERY

http://www.rampantscotland.com/placenames/placename_perth.htm

<https://thescottishaustralian.wordpress.com/2018/05/19/scottish-migrants-and-the-western-district/> In this case the Western District of Victoria but other links included.

http://museum.wa.gov.au/welcomewalls/browse-names/d?page=28&order=field_arrival_year_value&sort=desc

<https://www.brocross.com/Bricks/Penmorfa/Pages/scotland.htm>

<https://www.scottishbrickhistory.co.uk/j-m-craig-kilmarnock-brick-found-on-rottneist-island-west-coast-of-australia/>

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/welcomewalls/names/thomson-robert-caroline>

<https://goodlondoncopywriter.co.uk/tag/mighty-fuhrer-of-the-sausage-people/#:~:text=Sieg%20haggis!&text=Apparently%20Rabbie%20Burns's%20%E2%80%9CAddress%20to,the%20puddin'%2Drace!%E2%80%9D>

<https://scotcrest.com/?clan=Thomson&submitme=Find+Clan>

[https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Stirling-551#:~:text=Admiral%20Sir%20James%20Stirling%20was,of%20the%20Bath%20\(K.C.B.\)](https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Stirling-551#:~:text=Admiral%20Sir%20James%20Stirling%20was,of%20the%20Bath%20(K.C.B.))

<https://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/council/about-city-fremantle/council-coat-arms>

