

## YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 43

### THE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND

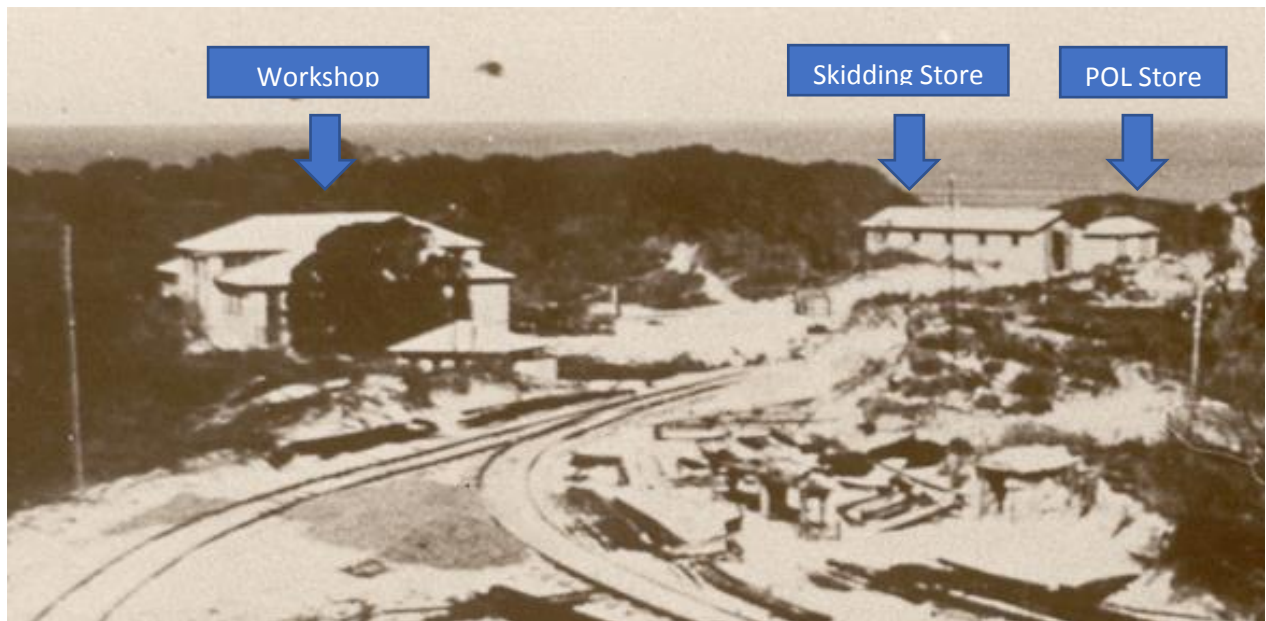


*The Virtual Visit series was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottnest Island was closed to the public due to social distancing restrictions and periods of use for quarantine from March to June 2020.*

*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.***

### THE MISSING BUILDINGS OF OLIVER HILL (PART 1)

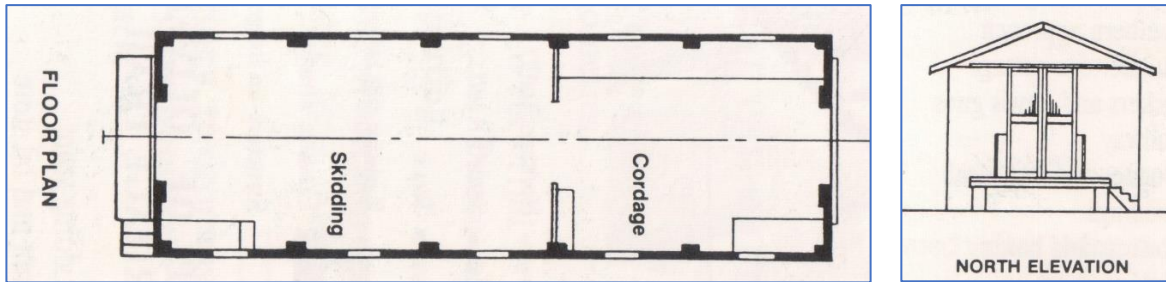


A visit today to the Oliver Hill is centred around the most significant heritage features, the two 9.2 inch Mk 10 guns and their Mk 7 mountings together with their underground support features of engine room, magazines, shell store, pump rooms and crew shelters. Positioned around the site however are the remains of other buildings which provided specific support to the guns. An understanding of how these buildings contributed to the military effectiveness of the Oliver Hill Battery provides a useful insight to the personnel and technology necessary for the guns to operate as *Guardians of the Gates*. This series of Virtual Visits will examine some of these vanished buildings.

#### **Skidding Store**

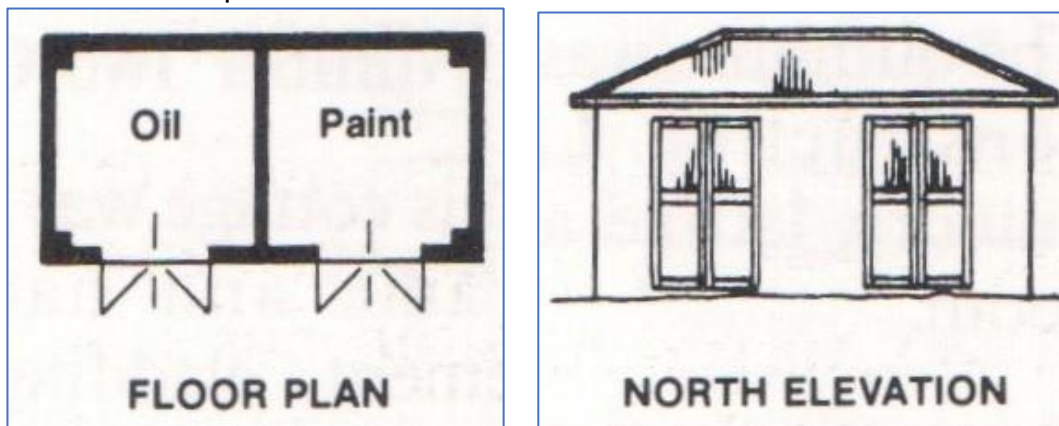
The skidding store was a two-section building for the storage of skidding and cordage. It had a floor reinforced with concrete beams to handle the weight of the stores and a centre line I beam with block and tackle hoist to lift heavy items. The skidding equipment such as heavy blocks, beams, rollers and wedges was necessary to

transport and install the guns. A separate area held the various ropes, pulleys, blocks and tackle and tripods used to hoist and shift components.



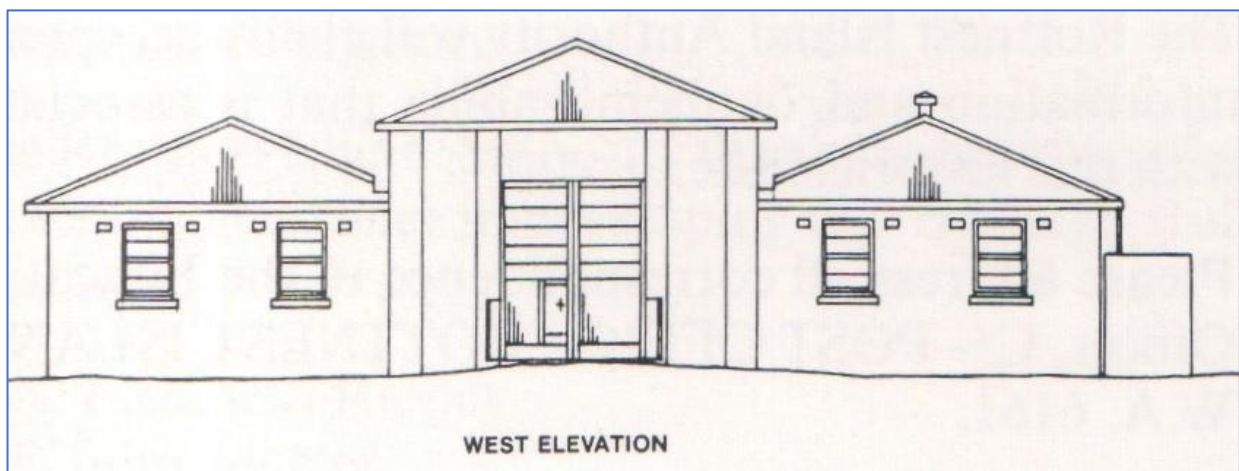
### **Petrol Oil and Lubricant (POL) Store**

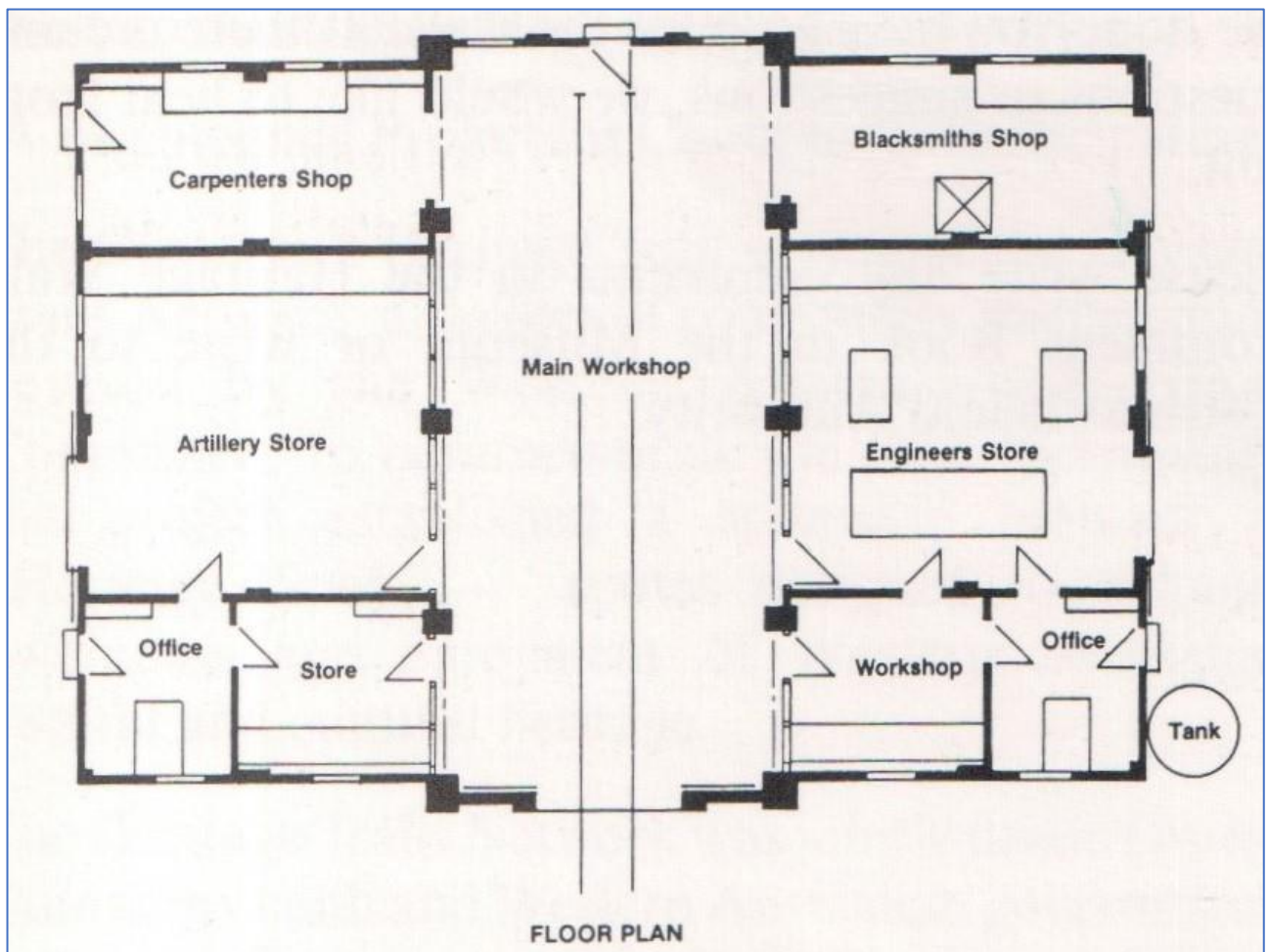
The POL Store was constructed of cement rendered brick with a timber and corrugated fibro-cement cladding. It was divided into two parts for the storage of inflammable oils and paints.



### **Workshop**

Each 9.2 inch battery site included a workshop with a central double height section with a reinforced concrete slab and an overhead gantry crane to facilitate the repair of heavy equipment. The workshop had a connection to the rail line to enable easy movement of components. On either side of the main workshop were stores and technical areas for the various support trades. The workshop was of brick construction with reinforced concrete columns in the central area to carry the overhead crane. Roof trusses and side buildings were timber clad with fibro-cement panels.

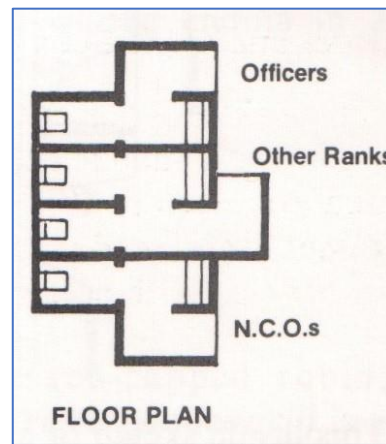
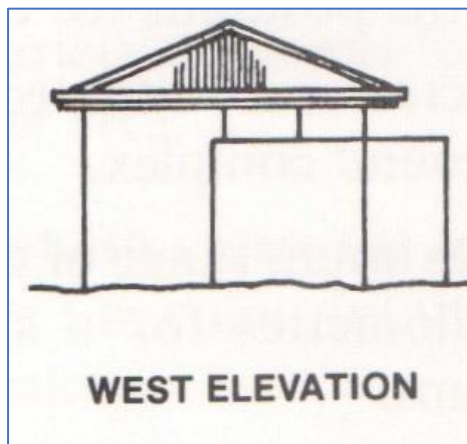




### Latrine Block

The latrine block was an essential feature to enable hygienic long term occupation of the site. Like other secondary buildings it was built of rendered brick with a corrugated fibro-cement roof. Taking advantage of gravity, the septic tank and soak wells were located further down the hill. In keeping with protocols of the time, the latrine block was divided into three sections to accommodate the all-male, officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks.





### **Current Status**

The Latrine, POL Store, Skidding Store were demolished. The Workshop was allowed to deteriorate before it too was demolished. Any remaining traces the POL and Skidding Stores have disappeared under the new bus turning bay. The site of the Latrine Block and Workshop have now largely been obscured by revegetation and dune stabilisation initiatives. Plans are being developed to emplace a large-scale site map, interpretive signage and location markers to enable the stories of these buildings to be included in the visitor experience at Oliver Hill.

### **Fibro-Cement Sheeting**

Asbestos cement, genericized as fibro- short for "fibrous cement sheet" was a building material in which asbestos fibres are used to reinforce thin rigid cement sheets. Although invented at the end of the 19th century, the material rose to necessity during World War II to make sturdy, inexpensive military structures, and continued to be used widely following the war as an affordable external cladding for buildings. Advertised as a fireproof alternative to other roofing materials such as asphalt, asbestos-cement roofs were popular not only for safety but also for affordability.

Asbestos-cement is usually formed into flat or corrugated sheets or piping, but can be molded into any shape wet cement can fit. Although fibro was used in a number of countries, it was in Australia and New Zealand where its use was the most widespread. Predominantly manufactured and sold by James Hardie & Co. The use of asbestos fibro-cement is now banned but until the mid-1980s, fibro in all its forms was a very popular building material, largely due to its durability. The current policies for the management of asbestos products and sites on Rottnest may be found at:

<https://ria.wa.gov.au/policy-and-reports/development-planning-policy/asbestos-register>

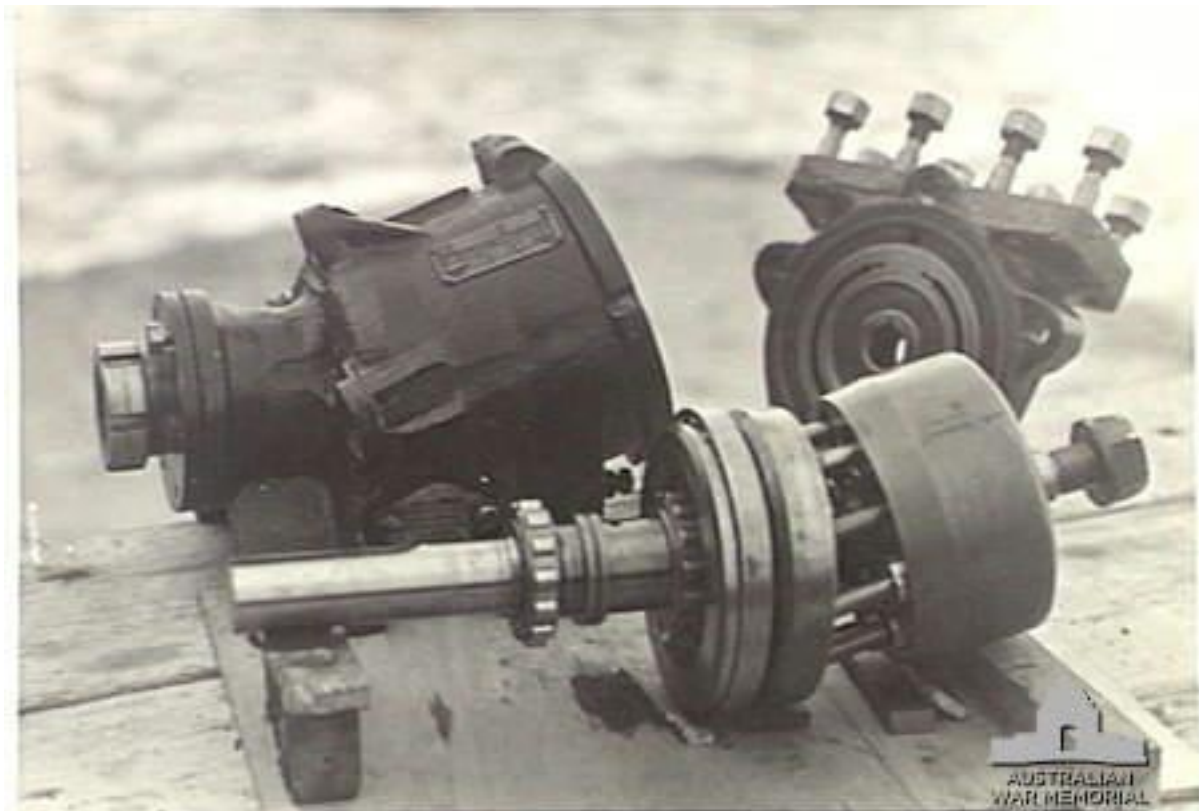




Abandoned workshop in vandalised state before demolition

<https://www.google.com/maps/@-32.0093802,115.5184532,1149m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en-GB>

[An annotated map with positions of current and former structures is being prepared]



Traversing motor gearbox – one of the 9.2-inch mounting components being prepared for service in the Workshop