

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 45

THE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND



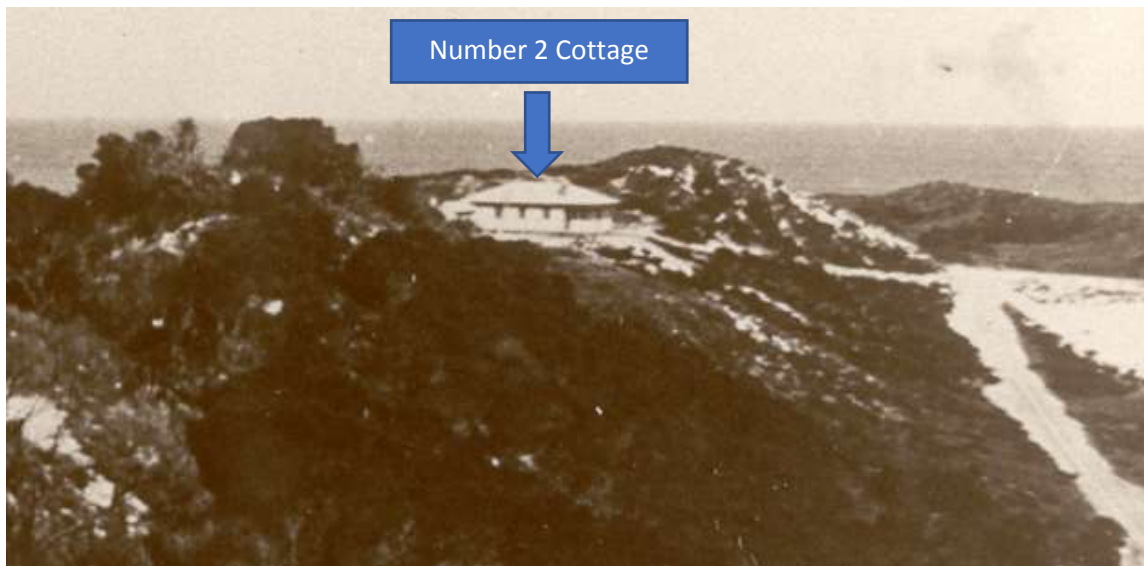
The Virtual Visit series was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottneest Island was closed to the public due to social distancing restrictions and periods of use for quarantine from March to June 2020.

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.

THE MISSING BUILDINGS OF OLIVER HILL (PART 2)

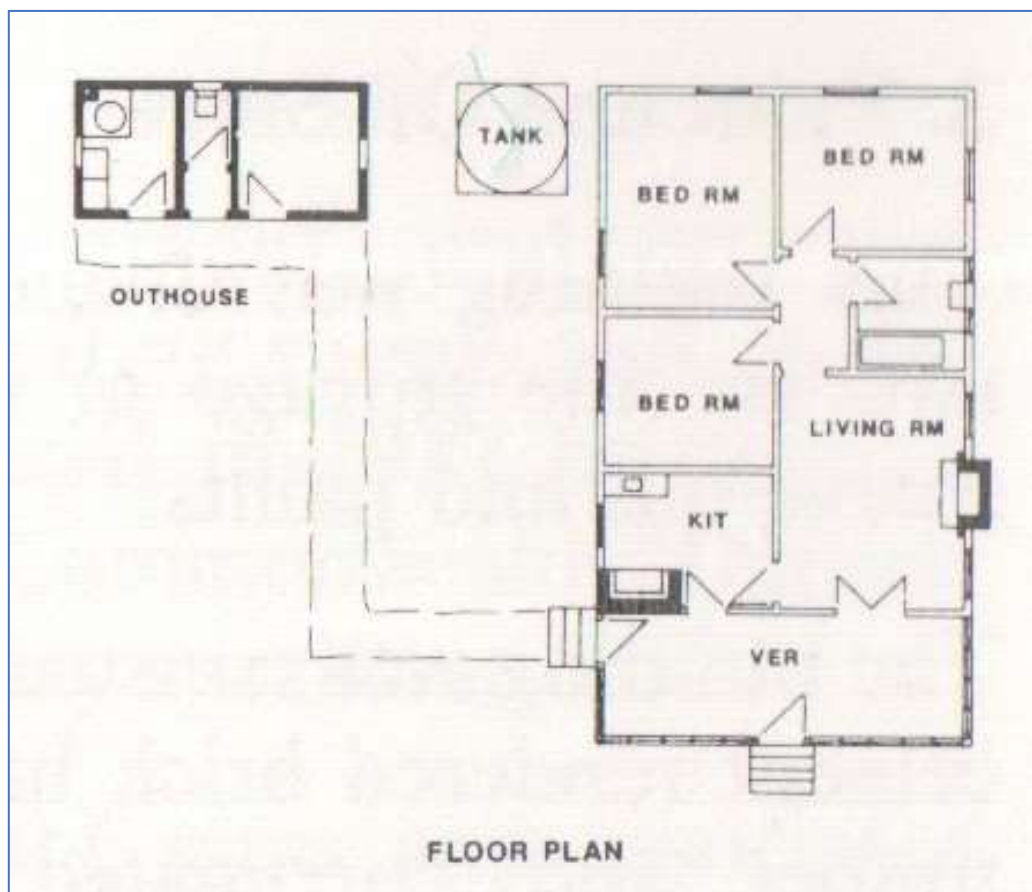
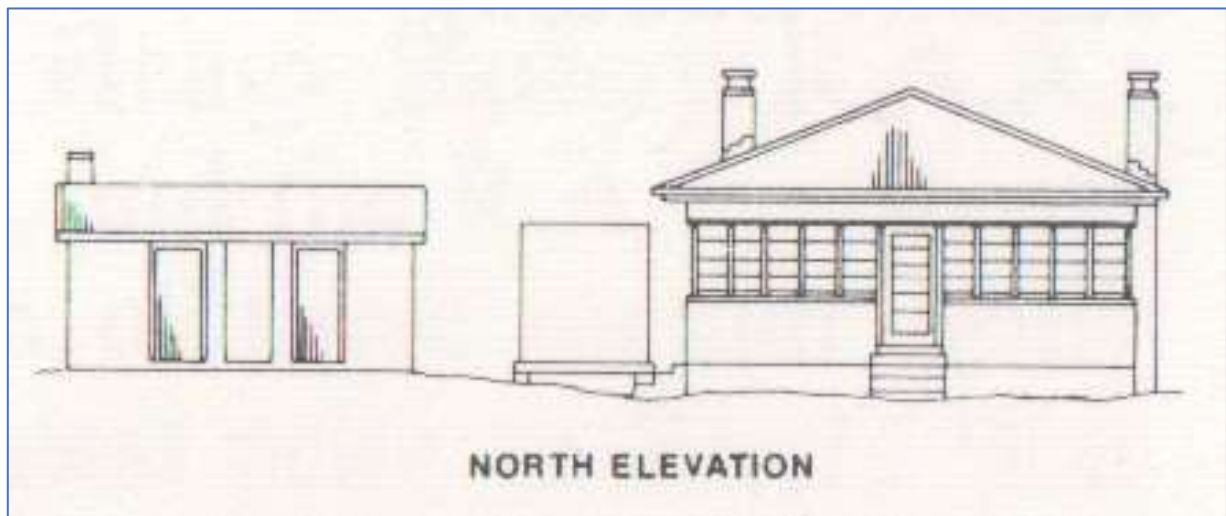
A visit today to the Oliver Hill is centred around the most significant heritage features, the two 9.2 inch Mk 10 guns and their Mk 7 mountings together with their underground support features of engine room, magazines, shell store, pump rooms and crew shelters. Positioned around the site however are 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.



Number 2 Cottage

This cottage overlooked Hell's Gully, the decline leading to the entrance to the Engine Room. It was of timber frame construction and had fibro cement cladding to all walls and the roof. There was an attached outhouse of brick construction housing a laundry, latrine, and storeroom. With three bedrooms it was originally used by battery

personnel, Number 2 Cottage later became part of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) Camp for the Plotting Room.



Number 2 Cottage as constructed

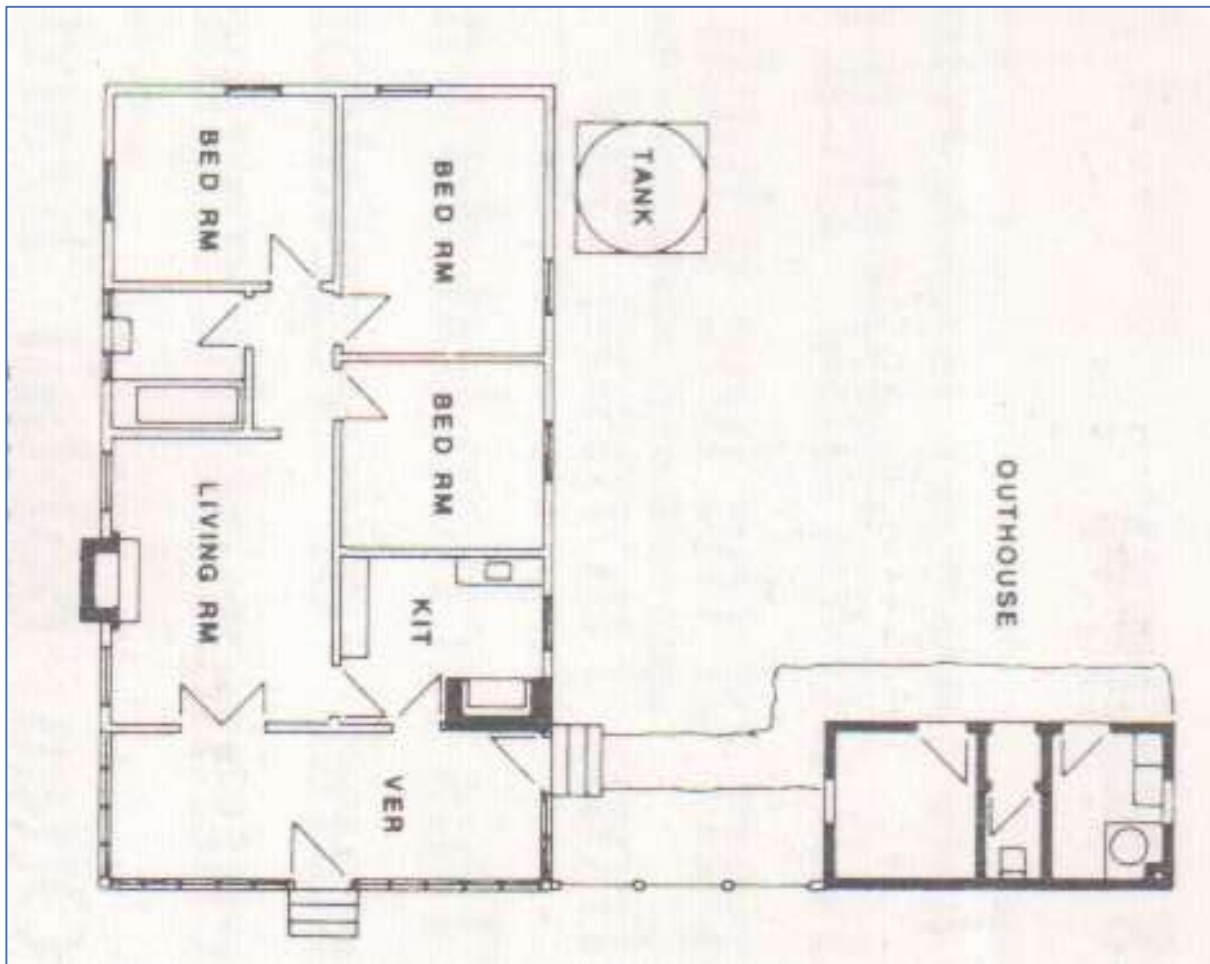
Number 1 Cottage



The cottage was oriented toward Salmon Bay and overlooked the cutting as the rail line turned at the top of the grade up the flank of Oliver Hill. It was similar in construction to Number 2 Cottage. Originally built as married quarters for the Master Gunner and his family,

it was later used as a wireless station by Signals when civilians were removed to the mainland.





Battery Camp

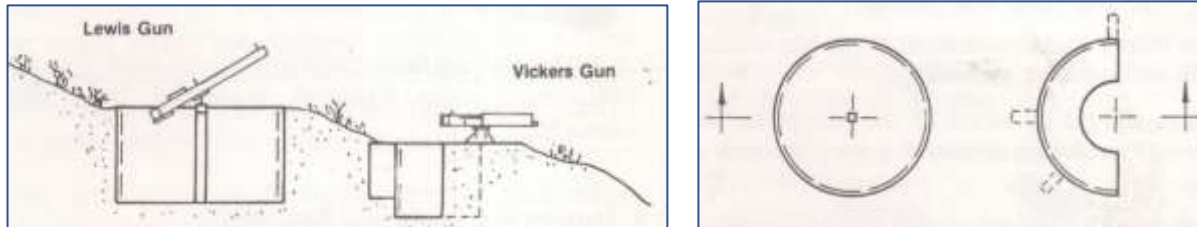


With the wartime expansion of the military garrison on Rottnest, the Fortress Engineers and Artillery were moved to a temporary camp at the base of Oliver Hill.

This not only placed them near the guns for rapid response but freed up the permanent buildings at Kingstown for medical and other support facilities. The Artillery Camp was self-contained with cooking, recreation and ablution facilities.

See also *Virtual Visit 12 The Ubiquitous P Hut*

Perimeter Fence and Local Defence



The Oliver Hill complex was surrounded by both perimeter and defensive rings of barbed wire covered by entrenchments supported by Lewis guns and Vickers machine gun posts. The local defence scheme was to put in place to counter any enemy attempt to launch a raid to capture the guns prior to a general assault on Fremantle.

See also *Virtual Visit 22 – Barbed Wire* and *Virtual Visit 16 – Lewis Gun for Air Defence*

Current Status

All of the foregoing buildings have either been demolished or relocated. The sites of the Cottages have been allowed to return to nature, while the location of the Battery Camp is now a mature plantation grove of melaleuca. Vestiges of the local defence weapons pits remain as do large sections of the perimeter and defence fencing. Except for illustrative interpretation, the fencing and local defences are not highlighted as in their overgrown condition they remain significant hazards to unwary visitors. Plans are being developed to emplace a large site map, interpretive signage and location markers to enable the stories of these buildings and structures 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 moulded 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>



AWAS detachment at Number 2 Cottage with laundry, and latrine building at right.

<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]



Full panorama showing four of the now missing buildings on Oliver Hill (L – R Workshop, Skidding Store, POL Store and No 2 Cottage).

The jury is still out on a large number of wartime defence facilities like that pictured below, scattered around Rottnest. Many are temporary wooden structures which cannot be usefully repurposed because of small size, location or dilapidation. Should they be restored to serviceable condition? Should they be stabilised and preserved as

ruins? Should they be documented and then made safe by removal? There is no one right answer to this heritage challenge. With finite funding and a multiplicity of needs, difficult decisions will need to be made to balance the competing interests of interpretation of defence history, stakeholder and visitor expectations and sustainable heritage management.



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