

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 65 TO THE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND



Virtual Visits were initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottnest Island was closed to the public due to lockdown and quarantine from March to June 2020. Virtual Visits have continued to enable a further enjoyment of stories introduced at the Wadjemup Museum, the Chapman Archives or sites around the Island.

Enjoy, reflect and share.

HJ Rex and the Lodge

In mid-April 1929, it was announced that the management of the Rottnest Hostel would change hands in June 1929. Management would pass from Mrs. R. A. Keough, who has had charge of Hostel for many years. The tender of Mr HJ Rex of Perth had been accepted in preference to those of Mrs Keough and Mr W Langley. Mr Rex's tender was the highest, spread over a period, of 10 years. In view of his previous experience and a lengthy association with the island, it was decided to grant him the lease. Mr. Rex had controlled hotels in Western Australia and in recent years was a prominent Perth printer. Other factors in granting the lease were his prominence in yachting circles, and his announced intention to provide an auxiliary screw lugger for a winter service to the island with the Hostel being open year-round. Previously, the season for the Hostel under Mrs Keough had focused on the December – April only.

Over the next 10 years, Perth newspapers are full of articles relating to the Rottnest Hostel under Rex's management. These articles bring to mind the saying of Mark Twain, that "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes". Many of the happenings and events of the 1930s recorded in Trove have a resonance with ongoing features of Rottnest today.



An article of 21 April 1929 highlights the continuing initiatives to promote visits to Rottnest on the “shoulders” of school holiday periods to take advantage of great experiences but a lesser cost and with less congestion.

By 1931 Rottnest will be the venue of metropolitan yachtsmen next week-end. A racing regatta for all classes of boats has been arranged and prize money totalling £30, in addition to the - entry fees, has been made available by the Rottnest Board of Control and the lessee of the Rottnest Hostel, Harry Rex. Entries have been received from every yachting club on the river and excellent racing; seems assured. It will be interesting to see how the smaller craft fare over the ocean course off Thompson's Bay, and the racing should provide a great spectacle for lookers. Cruisers, semi-raters, skiffs, dinghies and launches will participate in the various events and a series of swimming contests will be decided on Sunday.

The newspaper goes on to relate the adventures of passing under the Fremantle bridges:

Captain Clack, of the Fremantle Harbour Trust, said last night 'that low water at the Fremantle bridges would be reached at 3 p.m. to-day, and the flood would continue until 3 a.m. to-morrow morning. He pointed out, however, that the rise at present was no more than 1 ft: 5in., and that, yachtsmen should have little difficulty in negotiating the bridges tonight, even with the current against them. It was only a slight flow, and boats could be hauled through from an anchored dinghy providing plenty of rope and ground tackle were available.

The bridge referred to is referred to in the records as the Renovated High level Bridge. The first Fremantle bridge, 1866, was built out of timber by convict labour 1863-7, and was officially opened 2 October 1867. It was called the North Fremantle Bridge, and then, after the second bridge was constructed, the High Level Bridge. The Renovated High Level Bridge (RHLB) which opened on 18 June 1909 was a renovation of this original bridge so extensive that it is considered to be a third bridge. By the 1930s the RHLB was found to have deteriorated to a point where it was necessary to replace it. It was eventually demolished in 1947. The RHLB was replaced in 1939 by the Fremantle Traffic Bridge which is currently scheduled for replacement.



Photo from the late 1940s showing the 1939 Fremantle Traffic Bridge (Left) with the 1909 Renovated High Level Bridge still in place

Ever the canny entrepreneur, Mr Rex was not above using the Hostel facilities at hand to ensure his daughter's wedding was a success. The fulsome coverage, in the social reporting style of the times also provided useful advertising for other romantic brides to emulate.

A marriage of interest was quietly celebrated on Saturday, March 15 [1930], the Rottnest Hostel, when Thelma Evelyn, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs HJ Rex of Rottnest was married to John Craighill, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Balmer, of Highgate. The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a draped gown of white georgette appliqued in celanese taffeta. The beautiful Honiton lace veil was held in place -with a wreath of orange blossom and continued to form a train. Miss Dorothy and Miss Rene Rex as bridesmaids, wore frocks of white georgette and satin, draped in points to the ankle, and carried gold bouquets. Little Miss Shirley Rex as train bearer, wore white georgette in frills to the ankle. Mr. Lapsley was best man and Mr. AT Rex grooms- man. The bride's mother, Mrs Rex wore a becoming frock of blue georgette, draped in panels, while Mrs. Balmer, the mother of the bride- groom, wore a smart gown of black georgette with hat en- suite. [See Virtual Visit 55 for a military wedding]



A sense of glamour and style has been a traditional feature of Rottnest promotion

From the first days of settlement provision of emergency medical services to the Island were a challenge. An urgent situation arose in September 1936 calling for a rapid response and the flying of medical staff to the Island. Given the circumstances and the state of commercial aviation facilities, the response was exceptional.

Great fortitude was shown by Miss Dorothy Rex, daughter of Mr. Harry Rex, of the Rottnest Hostel, on Monday afternoon, when her clothes caught fire about 3 o'clock in the hostel laundry. Loudly shouting for assistance her cries brought no response but though severely burnt, she kept her head and smothered the flames herself with a blanket. Afterwards, wrapping the blanket around her, she managed to walk the 300 yards to the hostel before collapsing. Rendering what assistance he could, Mr Rex also summoned help by telephone from the mainland and within about half an hour a Moth plane piloted by Mr Viv James arrived at the Island with Dr Keith Gray, of Perth as passenger. The plane then flew back to Maylands and returned to Rottnest half an hour later with a trained nurse, who remained on the Island with her patient. Dr. Gray returned to Perth after he had attended to the burns and given instructions.



In November 1923, 52 hectares of farmland on the Maylands Peninsula, adjacent to the Swan River had been acquired by the Commonwealth Government and gazetted as **Maylands Aerodrome**.

Flying operations at the site declined with the opening of Perth and Jandakot airports and ceased on 30 June 1963.

<https://www.goodall.com.au/australian-aviation/maylands/maylandsaerodrome.html>
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/208718958?searchTerm=Rex%20Rottnest%20Hostel>
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