YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 69
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.

FLYING THE FLAG ON AND AROUND ROTTNEST

Three flags currently greet visitors to Rottnest Island in front of the Salt Store. On the central pole in place of precedence is the Australian national flag. To the left is the flag of Western Australia and to the right the Aboriginal flag. No longer illuminated at night, the flags are raised and lowered daily by RIA staff. These flags are the current manifestation of various flags which have flown on, near, or around Rottnest and the Western Australian coast over the past 400 years.

The "Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie" (V.O.C. - United East India Company) was a Dutch trading Company founded in 1602. Their flag was the Dutch Tricolour with the Company emblem placed on the white stripe. The upper stripe of the flag was changed to red between 1630 and 1660, possibly because darker colours were better visible at sea against a light sky.

The flag of the Dutch East India Company and its variants would have been flow from the time of Dirk Hartog in 1616 until 1720 and then less frequently as warfare and economic decline reduced VOC operations until it ceased to trade in 1799.

The East India Company (EIC), informally known as John Company was an English, and later British joint stock company founded to trade in the Indian Ocean region initially with the East Indies and later with Qing China. Initial competition with the Dutch in the Spice Islands was not successful, leading to a focus on India and China and a base in Singapore
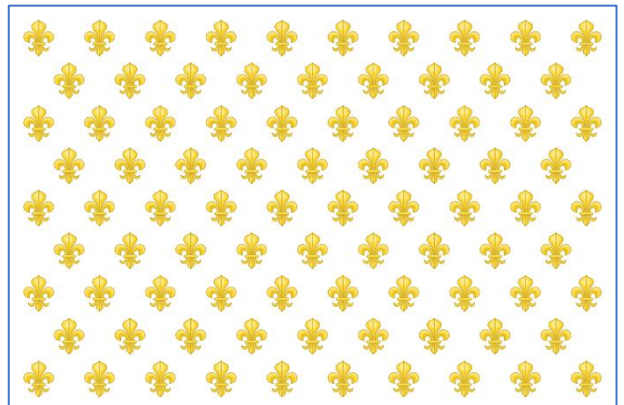
The first English vessel to visit, when attempting to sail the Dutch-established Brouwer Route to the East Indies, was *Tryall*, an East India Company-owned East Indiaman under the command of John Brookes, who in 1622 sighted Point Cloates before later on 25 May wrecking on Tryal Rocks, off the northwest coast of Australia. Some of the 143 crew remained on the Monte Bello Islands for 7 days, during that time sighting Barrow Island, before sailing to Batavia in a longboat. *Tryall* became Australia's oldest known shipwreck.
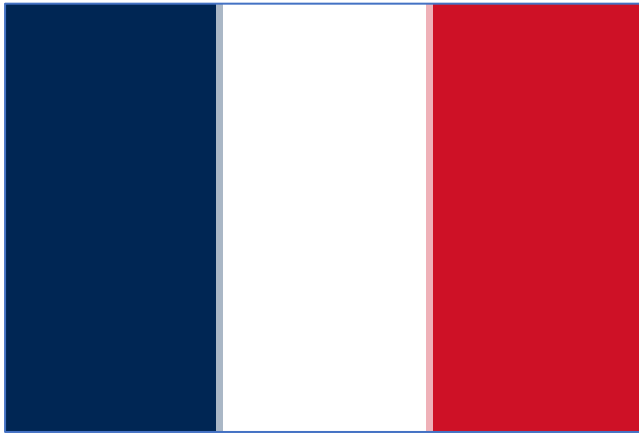

In 1681 English navigator John Daniel on *New London* charted part of the west coast of Australia, including Rottnest Island. He was followed in 1688 and 1699 by William Dampier in *Cygnet* as he explored the northwest and sailed down the coast.

On 12 April 1606, a new flag to represent this regal union between England and Scotland with James I and VI was specified in a royal decree, according to which the flag of England, a red cross on a white background, known as St George's Cross, and the flag of Scotland, a white saltire (X-shaped cross, or St Andrew's Cross) on a blue background, would be joined, forming the flag of England and Scotland for maritime purposes. This is probably the flag flown by Daniel and Dampier

Another European flag was seen along the coast when on 30 March 1772, Louis Aleno de St Aloüarn landed at Turtle Bay at the northern end of Dirk Hartog Island and claimed the island for France. When St Aloüarn visited New Holland in 1772, neither British nor Dutch officials had issued a formal claim over this western part of New Holland. However, the French claim over Western Australia was never secured by a permanent settlement.

The political situation in France had changed when Bruni d' Entrecasteaux in the *Recherche* and *Esperance* reached Cape Leeuwin in December 1792 and explored the southern coast. They were followed in 1801 by the *Geographe* and *Naturaliste* under Nicolas Baudin and Emmanuel Hamelin who explored much of the coast north from Cape Leeuwin, including the Swan River.

By this time the Fleur de Lis flag of the Bourbon's had been replaced by the tricolour of the Revolution.

In 1801, Matthew Flinders on HMS *Investigator* sighted Cape Leeuwin enroute to charting of southern Australian coastline. Further French expeditions occurred in 1818 under Louis de Freycinet and in 1826 under Dumont d'Urville who visited King George Sound before sailing along the south coast to Port Jackson. Continuing French interest led to the establishment of military garrison at King George Sound with the arrival of Major Edmund Lockyer on the brig *Amity* on 26 December 1826.

On 21 January 1827, Lockyer formally annexed the western portion of Australia, now Western Australia, in a ceremony at King George Sound. In 1829 – James Stirling arrived at the Swan River area and Captain Charles Fremantle again took possession of the western side of New Holland for the British crown.

Ireland having been integrated into the United Kingdom under a further Act of Union in 1803, these formalities took placed under the current form of the Union Jack.

The Foundation of Perth 1829, George Pitt Morison, 1929, oil on canvas, 97 x 138 cm. National Library of Australia 586293
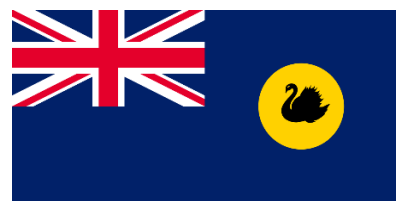
Another variation of the Union Jack was the flag of the Governor of Western Australia. Until 1988 the Union flag was superimposed with a black swan on a yellow disc within a circlet. It would have flown from a flagpole in front of the Vice Regal summer residence on Rottnest (now the Hotel)

This flag was in use from 1870 to 1953, when the direction of the swan was reversed (to face the hoist rather than facing the heraldic sinister) and in this form was used until 1988.

Federation saw the adoption of the Australian Red Ensign as the merchant navy and citizens flag with its original six-pointed federation star. One of the five winners of the national competition was Annie Dorrington, an artist from Perth. The blue ensign was reserved for naval and government use.

Today we see the current version of the Australian national flag (L) and the Western Australian state flag (R) flown in front of the Salt Store. The White Ensign of the Royal Australian Navy (Centre) is seen on RAN vessels transiting in and out of Fleet Base West as they pass the Island.
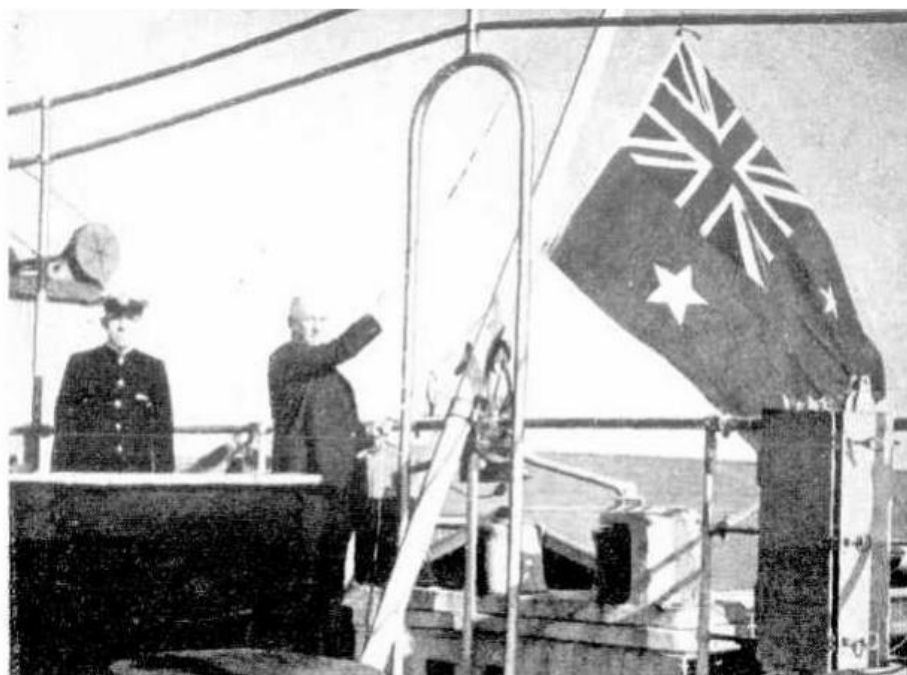

The Australian Aboriginal Flag was designed by artist Harold Thomas and first flown in Adelaide, South Australia, on National Aborigines Day in July 1971. It has become a recognised symbol of the unity and identity of Aboriginal people. The Commonwealth gave the flag legal recognition in July 1995 when it was proclaimed a 'Flag of Australia' under the Flags Act 1953.

Two other flags have an important operational and safety for activities on the waters near Rottnest. These are signal flags *Apha* (L) and *Hotel* (R)

Alpha signifies "Diver Below" and *Hotel* signifies "Pilot on Board"

Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), Thursday 4 July 1940, page 25 (2)

PRIZE OF WAR. The Collector of Customs in W.A. (Mr. H. St.G. Bird) hoisting the Australian flag on the Italian ship, "Remo," after the vessel had been awarded to the Crown by the Prize Court.

Notwithstanding regulations and sealed patterns, not all flags conform to design as this photo from 1940 illustrates. The Italian passenger ship *Remo* was berthed in Fremantle a few days before Italy entered World War 2, on 10 June 1940. The ship was seized by the Australian Government as a prize of war on 11 June and officers and crew were arrested as 'enemy aliens' and taken to internment camps. The flag show was probably an Australian courtesy flag produced in Italy taken from the *Remo's* flag locker.