

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 75 TO THE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNESST 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 WINNIT “ARMORIALS”

Founded in the summer of 1930-31, the Winnit Club is Rottnest Island’s longest-standing volunteer organisation. While founding members initially came together for annual sailing and camping trips to Rottnest Island, they soon decided they wanted to give something back to their favourite Island. The Winnit Club participates in five to six weekends of work on the Island annually.

Today it is virtually impossible to find a spot on the Island that has not benefited from the efforts of the Winnit Club. Major accomplishments include the construction of the Island’s first Nursing Post, the original ‘Quokka Shelter’ and West End board walk, the instalment of emergency lighting at the Airport (with the final connections and testing being undertaken by the Department of Civil Aviation) and the restoration of the Oliver Hill Gun Battery.



This involved painting the Command Bunker and Number 2 Gun emplacements and filling hundreds of sandbags. Other significant achievements of the Winnit’s include the installation of stairs at Bathurst Lighthouse, Salmon Bay, Fay’s Bay, Geordie Bay & Narrow Neck, the paving of the P Hut and train shed, the construction of all the railway stations platforms and shelters, painting the seawall twice from end to end, maintaining the Museum and the salvaged hull of the Anitra II before it was demolished, the installation of numerous beach access paths and all of the fencing from Villa Kitson to Bathurst Lighthouse.

The ongoing contributions of the Winnits are recognised in an exhibit in the Wadjemup Museum. They share space with the Rottneest Voluntary Guides and the Rottneest Foundation. Representing the contributions of the Winnits is an embroidered banner of “assumed” armorials: assumed in the sense that they were not granted or conferred by the College of Arms or the Lord Lyon who in the absence of an Australian Heraldic Authority are the sources of such an honour.

While not conforming to traditional heraldic design conventions, the design nevertheless conveys in a visual form much of the history, ethos and values of the Winnits. In this the embroidery meets many of the accepted functions of traditional heraldry to convey identity, lineage and social relationships. Unfortunately, there is not space within the exhibit at the Museum to explain the details and symbology presented in the art work. To this we must turn to the Chapman Archives and various versions of the history of the Winnits.

What was described as the Winnit standard and crest was drawn by club member Allan Thomas, a trained sign writer, in 1932. It wasn't until 1940, when Phyllis Gaunt, girlfriend of the then club secretary, Dan Fogerty, began the process of embroidering the design. Before being placed in the Wadjemup Museum, the banner hung on the main tent pole and was prominent in club initiations,

The design features a traditionally shaped shield (described in conventional heraldic terms as heater shaped) above which as a crest are the rays of a rising sun. The shield has two supporters (heraldically described as proper but more on that later) and below the shield, in English heraldic style, is a scroll containing the club motto. The two winnit supporters (holding the shield) face each other with forepaws stretched aloft, posteriors raised in a posture which could creatively be described as *passant descendent guardant*. The motto reads “*Sherbert be to he who sherbert drinks*” complimented underneath with the words, “*By God, you're right*”.

Amazingly, the description of the shield initially follows the Norman-French language and conventions of heraldry. The shield is divided quarterly and the location of the quarters is described from the shield bearer's Left and Right (ie opposite to those of us viewing the shield from the front. In the first quarter is a pyramid of beer kegs, a beverage deemed by the club as essential to good health and fellowship. In the upper left (sinister) quarter the story of Leo the Lion and Monk is depicted (see the Archives for details), referencing the spiritual bond of altruism within the club. The third quarter depicts a fish and lyre celebrating the role of fishing and music in a Winnit's life. This is also an example of “canting arms” as fishermen are inveterate liars. The fourth quarter depicts the back view of a winnit marching forward to a new country and a new life. The tail is erect to indicate strength and determination and allows the famous purple spot to be seen. (Proper).

“Proper” in a blazon indicates that the heraldic charge or device appears as in nature rather than a prescribed heraldic colour. The club mascot, the winnit, began as a practical joke expanded later in a letter to the West Australian on 17 March 1932 describing the sighting at West End of a cat like creature, furry but green and possessing a purple spot under its tail. With the chance discovery of a suitable ceramic representation subsequently painted to correspond to the description, a legendary creature was born. A *winnit proper* therefore is green with a purple spot under its tail.

This Virtual Visit was prompted by questions raised in the Museum Comments log at the Wadjemup Museum. Hopefully, the questions raised are now answered Unfortunately, no suitable images of the Winnit Armorial are currently at hand, hence the text dense result.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnit_Club

<https://ria.wa.gov.au/volunteering-and-partnership/independent-volunteer-groups>

<https://www.rotnestfoundation.org.au/affiliated-volunteers>

<https://archives.rvga.asn.au/category/clubs-associations/winnets/>

<https://www.amazon.com.au/Simple-Heraldry/dp/0702810096>

<https://www.college-of-arms.gov.uk/>

<http://www.heraldry-scotland.co.uk/lyon-court.html>

