****Rottnest Voluntary Guides Association Inc.****

**Des Sullivan**

Des Sullivan was a rangy bloke whose courteous manner masked a lofty career. He was a man with a plethora of accomplishments, which people on Rottnest and throughout WA would readily testify to.

Known as *The King of Rottnest*, Des Sullivan’s philosophy was to promote the unique qualities of Rottnest – its relaxed, casual but unsophisticated character, without hampering the fragile ecology. During his 25-year reign as *King of Rottnest*, and again on the day he retired in July, 1984, Des was before his time in speaking of his desire to see environmental issues kept at the top of the then Board’s agenda.

He always channelled his energies towards preserving the island’s natural flora, fauna, geology and marine life, and until his last days on the Island, he considered reafforestation a top priority

**Des Sullivan’s Rottnest – in his own words**

I had never been to Rottnest until the island manager’s job was advertised in 1959. I was intrigued by the number of people I knew who were putting in for the job, and to satisfy my curiosity, I flew over for a day. On the island I inquired about the water supply, sewerage, power (one 70hp Rushton and transmitting DC power), and there was no hospital. I also found iceboxes instead of refrigerators, wood stoves in all 52 holiday units, the ferry jetty was a kilometre from the Settlement, and the only made road was from the Settlement to the main lighthouse. The six-inch battery at Kingston Barracks had been disposed of for scrap and a similar fate was planned by the Commonwealth Government for the Oliver Hill battery. And last but not least, there was no golf course!

It was fortunate that my first view of Rottnest was from the air; Vlamingh’s description of it was quite right; it really is a beautiful island. This job, I thought, is worth having a go at, so I applied for it, at the same time making it clear that I wanted to move on in five years. I stayed 25 years and never regretted it. It was the most satisfying job I ever had, and I had a number of interesting jobs.

Some people do not like Rottnest, but most do, and develop a real love for the place, and many such people are really keen to help the island. The golf course is an example and its development cost the Rottnest Island Board nothing. A few islanders and mainlanders put in 250 pounds to get it going. The army carried out earthworks as a training exercise, and, with lots of voluntary local labour, we had our first Rottnest Island Cup in August 1961. The first clubhouse was a tin shed with an earth floor, but it did have a hand basin and was built at a total cost of nine pounds, a far cry from the lovely clubhouse of today. To my knowledge the club has remained self-supporting.

The army was always helpful. Apart from work on the golf course and earthmoving around the settlement, the army, as a training exercise, constructed the present road which runs from the main lighthouse to Parker Point.

Then there is the Winnit Club who seek to assist the island in every way possible; they not only equipped the first hospital, but paid the salary of the sister in charge until several years later when the Health Department assumed responsibility. The first sister in charge was Fay Smith who later became my very supportive wife, and the Rottnest Island Board named Fay’s Bay after her in recognition of her 11 years of nursing service on the island.

Rottnest is basically a family place, and I soon realised what its unsophisticated lifestyle meant to families – a dream place for children and a relaxing place for mum and dad. A great charm about the island is that the present administration has taken pains to retain this lifestyle. Environmentally, the Rottnest coastline is, and always will be, very fragile’ administrations over the years are to be commended for such programs as constructing pine log paths for beach access in order to protect the dunes.

When I retired from Rottnest, there were two problems which were not evident when I first went there. Moorings; There were so few launches then, and up until 1968 there were free spaces everywhere. The other problem will be rubbish disposal because after the present disposal site is filled up, some rubbish probably have to be shipped out. Many people tell me that I should have written a book about Rottnest and its visitors. I always say that some people would pay me not to write.

Des Sullivan, the World War Two Lancaster bomber pilot and long-time manager of Rottnest Island died peacefully in October 2007; he will forever be on his beloved Rottnest. On November 25th, Des’ family carried his ashes to the island to be interred in the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in a private ceremony conducted by the island’s Monsignor John O’Shea. A plaque on the wall above a small crypt tells of Des Sullivan’s 25 years’ service to the island.

‘A lot has been written and said about Des,’ his wife Fay said, ‘ but most of all he was a kind man with a wonderful approach to life.’