

Erased Places? Revealing the Mission network of the Swan River Colony, 1829–1879

Janet Osborne¹

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the institutions established for First Nations (Nyungar) children and young adults (16 missions and other residential institutions) operating in the first 50 years of the Swan River Colony, Western Australia (1829–1879), and their potential as sites of archaeological investigation. Focusing upon two institutions operating within this network, at Perth, run by the colonial government and Wesleyan Methodists between 1833 and 1844, it asks to what extent these missions operated as part of a network of surveillance and control of Nyungar lives. Evidence for the archaeology and the history of these places is examined and specifically their varying spatial characteristics, that were exploited by administrators in attempts to colonise and control Nyungar inmates. The role of such missions in the landscape of frontier colonialism and the colonial society and economy is explored.

Keywords: Missions, Aboriginal children, Australian colonisation, assimilation, Nyungar, Noongar, Nyungah

... we had no Parents to guide, love and nurture us, it was total strangers to handle our every needs. We also lost our childhood by being taken away from our Parents (Narkle, in Kenny 2007: 47).

INTRODUCTION

In this article I seek to explore what historical and archaeological investigation can contribute to understanding the lives of Nyungar people who became the inmates of mission institutions of the Swan River Colony, now Western Australia, between 1829 and 1879 (the first 50 years of European occupation). Initial research conducted on missions operating during this period has identified 16 sites throughout Nyungar country, in the south-west of Western Australia (Figure 1), indicating the large scale of the institutionalisation of Nyungar children in this period. To date, no archaeological investigations of Western Australian missions operating in this period have been conducted (Winter 2013), excepting some grey literature generated in the course of Aboriginal Heritage Surveys (e.g. Chown & Mattner 2011; Cuthbert, McDonald & Hovingh 1998). Indeed, only one Western Australian mission site in any period has been investigated archaeologically; the Elensbrook Farm Home for Aboriginal Children, operated between 1899 and 1917 (Green 2018).

First Nations children removed from families and culture under assimilation policies are known today in Australia as the ‘Stolen Generations’ (Haebich 1999; AIATSIS 2018). The institutionalisation of First Nations peoples in contexts of colonialism is a sensitive and emotional subject, particularly for communities and descendants. However, First Nations communities also argue that ‘truth-telling’ (Reconciliation Australia 2018) about the Stolen Generations is an essential part of healing (ALSWA 1995: iii).

The reason why I tell my story to everyone I can is because I want all people to learn our history and what we went through. My dad spoke out because he wanted everyone to know what happened to him and his kids. My dad never got an answer as to why his kids were taken by the authorities of the day. Even today us kids, now adults, want to understand why the authorities took us away. (Kickett 2020).

The forced removal of First Nations children from their families can be traced back to the earliest forms of religious humanitarianism responsible for establishing missions and similar institutions in each of the Australian colonies (Harris 1990: 261; Mitchell 2011: 4). Thus, archaeological and historical research of such mission sites in Western Australia has the potential to contribute much to First Nations communities, as well as to academic discourse.

Questions that may be addressed through archaeological investigation of Western Australian missions of this period include how the ‘mission places’ were organised spatially, how they were situated in the landscape, and

¹ PhD Candidate, Archaeology, University of Western Australia

Corresponding author: janet.osborne@research.uwa.edu.au

Submitted 19/5/20, accepted 24/8/20. First online 4/9/20.

what this communicates about the ideologies informing their operation. Historical archaeological research can also reveal how these places can be understood as sites of culture contact, accommodation, survivance, persistence, and resistance, and what expressions of the agency, identities, and lifeways of Nyungar inmates can be identified. Other methods such as historical and biographical research can also contribute to an understanding of to what extent these mission places operated as a formal or informal network of control over Nyungar people, and to what extent they operated as part of the machinery of colonialism in Western Australia.

In this paper I review all missions known to have operated in Western Australia in the period 1829–1879, and summarise their potential as sites of archaeological and historical research. Particular emphasis is given to their ‘hidden’ (Rose 1991; Murray 1993), ‘obscured’ (Winter 2017), or even ‘erased’ (Harrison & Williamson 2002) character. I go on to briefly introduce two of these sites and discuss preliminary research findings in relation to them. These two sites are the ‘Mount Eliza Ration Depot’/‘Mount Eliza Native Institution’ and the ‘Perth Native School’.

MISSIONS IN THE SWAN RIVER COLONY, 1829–1879

The Swan River Colony was established in June 1829, on the lands of the Whadjuk Nyungar (Swan River region), Pindjarup Nyungar (Murray River region) and Balardong Nyungar (Avon River region) peoples (Collard 2020). Invader relations with these local Nyungar groups followed a pattern – in common with colonial frontiers in other parts of Australia – of dispossession and violence. In Western Australia, as in other Australian colonies (Mitchell 2011: 4–5), the model of institutionalisation created by the tandem influences of the colonial government and religious institutions remained powerful in shaping the state’s assimilation policies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many missionaries, colonists, and members of the Colonial administration in the Swan River Colony considered themselves to be humanitarians, and several had been active in British anti-slavery movements. They believed that Christianising and ‘civilising’ First Nations peoples was a moral imperative (Harris 1990; Mitchell 2011; Swartz 2019). During the 1830s, this form of humanitarianism prompted British Colonial Office policies for the treatment of First Nations peoples of the British colonies (Nettlebeck 2013).

The concept of race is also linked to humanitarianism and ‘civilising’ narratives in this period of Australian colonial history (Attwood 2017: 31). The construction and maintenance of racial difference was useful in the Swan River Colony, as elsewhere, in instituting a rigid hierarchical divide between a master and a servant class (Swartz 2019: 78). Policies of assimilation and segregation, and ideas of racial superiority and inferiority also had direct impacts on the ways mission institutions in the Swan River Colony

were run, and to what extent they were enabled and supported by successive Colonial administrations.

The institutionalisation of First Nations children in Western Australia began under the British *Master and Servant Act* of 1823, by which children were indentured to mission superintendents, local Protectors of Aborigines, or Resident Magistrates, usually for a period of 10 years. By 1833, Beeliar Nyungar (south side of the Swan River) leader Midgegooroo was wanted for several frontier murders of settlers, and in May 1833 he was captured, along with his youngest son Billy. Midgegooroo became the first and only person to be executed under martial law in Western Australia (*Perth Gazette* 1833c: 83). Billy, aged about six years, was held captive for several months in the home of a settler family at Fremantle before being returned to his mother, following repeated enquiries and agitation from his family (Hallam & Tilbrook 1990: 212). Billy’s experience is the first documented instance of child removal in Western Australia, but the first instance of long-term institutionalisation occurred in 1836, with a Nyungar boy named Goongar, aged about seven years, indentured to the superintendent of the Mount Eliza Native Institution, and living permanently in the private home of his ‘master’.

Ostensibly, Goongar and the many Nyungar children who followed him, were beneficiaries of the benevolent humanitarianism of missionaries and colonial personnel. In practise, they were the subjects of evolving colonial policies of colonisation and assimilation, and a pool of unfree labour for the struggling Swan River Colony, where there was ‘plenty of land and no labour’ (Hawtrey 1949: 15).

Places identified as ‘missions’ in this article are not all projects of the various missionary societies. I include in the definition any institution that exerted physical and moral control over Nyungar children in the period 1829–1879, such as colonial schools with a residential component (Figure 1 and Table 1). In any case, the Swan River Colony was a sufficiently small place in this period that missionary and colonial personnel were often overlapping and interchangeable. Attempts to train Nyungar people as farm workers were also conducted at Rottnest Island (Wadjemup) between 1840 and 1855 (Green 2009b: 683). While Rottnest Island Prison was primarily a carceral institution, and not a mission, Nyungar children were also occasionally confined there, for absconding from their indentures to various missions. For example, a Nyungar boy named Jar (Joseph) had absconded from the Perth Native School, and was sentenced to three months hard labour (*Perth Gazette* 1844: 2). The same boy was later returned to the Perth Native School, and his indenture transferred to Governor Hutt as a domestic servant, highlighting the close links between the two institutions. Thus, carceral institutions such as Rottnest Island should be considered in any discussion of mission archaeology and history in Western Australia.

Winter’s (2013) critical review of historical archaeological research in Western Australia notes that there has been a dearth of contact archaeology research (including

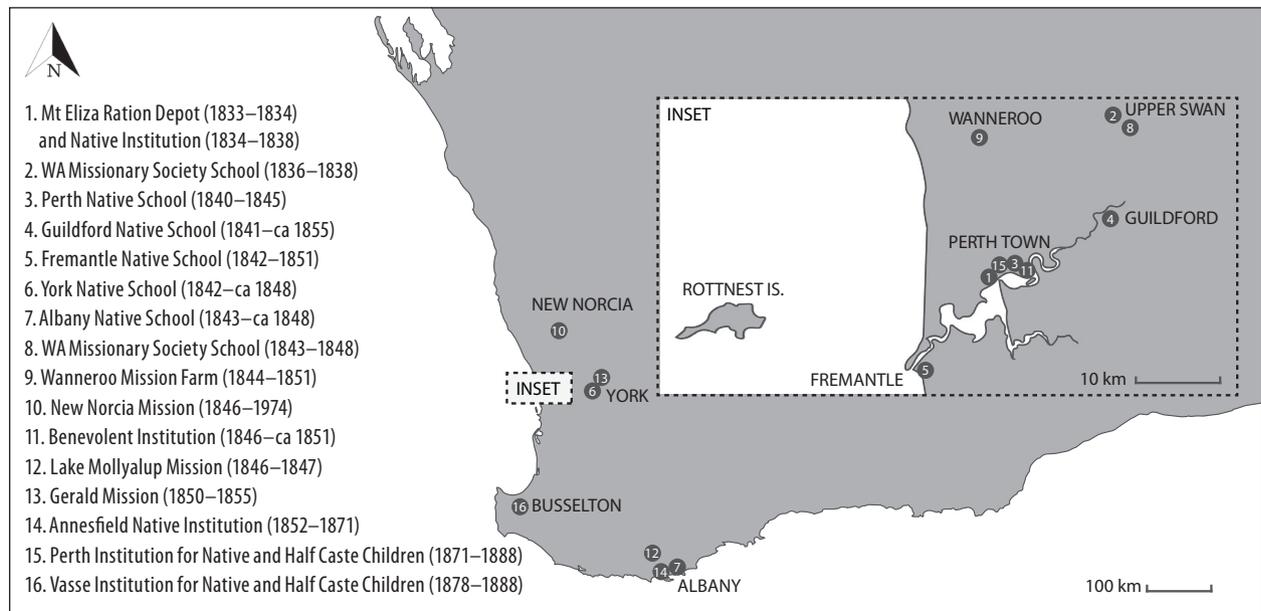


Figure 1. Map of the South West of Western Australia showing all known missions operating 1829–1879.

mission sites) in the South West of the state, especially for the colonial period. Lydon and Ash's (2010) survey of archaeological research in missions across Australasia also reveals an absence of mission research in the West.

Since then, the archaeology of missions in Western Australia has remained little-researched. Only one archaeological investigation of a mission site has been conducted to date; an unpublished Honours thesis on the underfloor archaeology of the Ellensbrook Farm Home for Aboriginal Children, at Mokidup (Ellensbrook), which operated between 1899 and 1917 (Green 2018). Green conducted an archaeological investigation of underfloor deposits in four rooms of Ellensbrook Homestead, and combined with a careful historical reconstruction of details of the lives of the Nyungar child inmates, provided a nuanced and informative picture of the lives of those children while they were inmates at Ellensbrook.

No archaeological research has been conducted in relation to mission sites in the earlier period (i.e. before Ellensbrook was established), with the exception of occasional, purely descriptive, and necessarily narrow, mitigation work conducted as part of Aboriginal Heritage Protection processes. South-west missions are occasionally mentioned in passing in the grey literature of Aboriginal Heritage Survey reports (e.g. Chown & Mattner 2011; Cuthbert, McDonald & Hovingh 1998; O'Connor, Bodney & Little 1985), but are not subject to historical contextualisation, comparative analysis, or academic review in such a format.

Archaeological investigations have been conducted at a small number of mission sites in other Australian states, including at Poonindie Mission (Griffin 2010), Killalpaninna Mission (Birmingham 2000; Birmingham & Wilson 2010), and Ooldea Mission (Brockwell *et al.*

1989) in South Australia, Lake Condah Mission Station (Rhodes & Stocks 1985) and Ebenezer Mission in Victoria (Lydon 2009a; Lydon 2009b), Wellington Valley Mission (Ireland 2010) and Blacktown Native Institution in New South Wales (Lydon 2005), Weipa Mission in Queensland (Ratican 2009; Morrison *et al.* 2010), and Wybalenna Aboriginal Settlement in Tasmania (Birmingham 1992; Birmingham & Wilson 2010).

Theoretical approaches amongst these studies vary. Landscape archaeology approaches employed at Killalpaninna, Wybalenna, Wellington Valley, Weipa, Poonindie, and Ebenezer consider themes of transformation and accommodation (Birmingham & Wilson 2010; Ratican 2009), dominance, resistance, and agency (Birmingham 1992; Birmingham & Wilson 2010; Griffin 2010; Ireland 2010; Morrison *et al.* 2015), and the panopticon (Lydon 2009b) as useful theoretical frameworks through which to understand mission landscapes. Archaeologies of capitalism and inequality are well-applied alongside landscape analysis by Griffin (2010) at Poonindie. Sutton (2003) argues convincingly for the application of Goffman's (1968) 'total institution' theory in her review of several Queensland missions, based on archaeological and photographic evidence relating to spatial control and segregation of inmates.

The archaeology of missions and other institutions (e.g. Western Australian First Nations carceral sites such as Rottnest Island, and Bernier and Dorre Islands) sits within the broader context of archaeologies of colonialism and contact. Contact archaeology in Western Australia has been limited in the south-west and largely concentrates on the north-west of the State where there have been significant contributions to contact archaeology from the Kimberley (e.g. Harrison 2002; O'Connor *et al.* 2013; Smith 2000) and

Pilbara (e.g. Harrison 1996, 2000; Nayton 1992; Paterson 2006, 2011; Paterson & Veth 2020; Paterson & Wilson 2009; Stingemore 2002, 2010; Taçon *et al.* 2012) regions.

Contact studies from the south-west also remain limited. Anderson (2016) explores cross-culture contact and colonisation processes through sealing and whaling sites of the Southern Ocean, including in southern Western Australia. Harrison (1996, 2000) discusses regional variation in glass artefact manufacture across sites at Shark Bay (Mulgarna, Yamatji cultural bloc) and the Swan River (Whadjuk, Nyungar cultural bloc). Whitley (2015) investigates First Nations racial unfree labour at Fremantle Prison and Rottneest Island (Wadjemup) and discusses how institutionalised contexts of forced labour can be understood archaeologically. Economically driven cross-cultural contact (Anderson 2016), regional variations in the incorporation of new raw materials (Harrison 1996, 2000), archaeological evidence of the presence and experiences of First Nations people in institutional contexts (Whitley 2015), and the archaeological signatures of First Nations children at contact sites (Green 2018) are all key themes relevant to my research, though not specific only to south-west, or even only Western Australian missions archaeology.

With some notable exceptions (e.g. Allen 1969, 2008; Birmingham 1992; Murray 1993), Australian archaeology has, in the past, participated in maintaining a false dichotomy between prehistoric and First Nations versus historical and European periods (Lydon & Ash 2010; Paterson 2010), with little acknowledgement of the extent of cross-cultural encounters (Murray 1993), which problematises such categories (Paterson 2010). More recent scholarship has acknowledged how ‘contact’ has sometimes been oversimplified and – even in a colonial context – was not simply a unilateral and unidirectional flow of power, ideas, and material culture (Clarke & Torrence 2000; Harrison 2005; Griffin 2010). First Nations people were ‘enmeshed’ in the colonial world of settlers (Paterson 2010:166), and *vice versa*, creating at times competing (Strang 1999) and at times shared (Harrison 2004; Murray 1996) landscapes of meaning. Contact is also better understood as a process rather than a moment (Lightfoot 1995). It is therefore appropriate to consider the entire South West in the colonial period as a contact landscape.

This is well demonstrated by the Mount Eliza site discussed further below. For example, in 1836, the Governor of the Swan River Colony instructed the superintendent at Mount Eliza to employ the Nyungar people residing there ‘in breaking up and quarrying stone, of which there is an abundance near the establishment ... The stone will be stacked, and will be available either for public works, or will be disposed of to private individuals’ (*Perth Gazette* 1835: 482). Thus it is very likely that buildings from this period incorporated stone quarried using Nyungar labour. Such buildings are an important reminder that the enmeshment of Nyungar and settler lives are still represented in the material culture of the Swan River Colony.

This initial research into the residential institutions operating in the Swan River Colony in the period up to 1879 represents a new synthesis of the available historical and archival material. Previous historical research has concentrated on one or several affiliated institutions, or on one religious denomination or missionary project, without giving full consideration to the broader context of Church and State activities in institutionalising Nyungar children in this period. The question of to what extent the missions of this period operated as a network or system is worthy of closer investigation. Tracking the movement of mission personnel and, especially, of Nyungar subjects between institutions is a useful way to make the mission network more visible.

It is also worth investigating the ways in which institutions in this network of missions interacted with each other across the Western Australian colonial landscape, and what the placement of each in the landscape can say about attitudes and policies towards First Nations people in the Swan River Colony, especially in terms of segregation and assimilation (Swartz 2019: 83–84).

In terms of understanding the character of the missions themselves, and approaching a better understanding of what life may have been like as an inmate, a typology for assessing mission institutions will be established to assess both the place-based and landscape characteristics of each institution. Analysis will include identifying the extent to which each mission instantiates characteristics of a ‘total institution’ (Goffman 1968; Sutton 2003). Winter’s (2017: 60) ‘continuum of institutional control’ assesses institutions on a continuum of open to closed, and is also a useful rubric for assessing the coercive pressure of missions on their subjects.

Beyond merely seeking to understand the missions as sites in the archaeological sense, it is important to consider mission sites more ‘holistically’ (Paterson 2010:171) as places of contact between First Nations people and European colonists (e.g., Birmingham 2000; Harrison 2004; Head & Fullagar 1997; Paterson 2008). Extending this methodology still further, I argue it is appropriate and worthwhile to acknowledge that such missions are also a nexus of social landscapes of colonialism and contact. Historical archaeology is methodologically well-suited to revealing details of subaltern lives, but other, complimentary methods can also contribute biographical, prosopographic, and genealogical data to a truly ‘holistic’ mission research methodology (e.g. Birmingham & Wilson 2010; Brock & Kartinyeri 1989; Green 2018). By following the life trajectories of Nyungar children like Jar (Joseph), Billy, and Goongar as they were moved through institutions, connections between missions in the Swan River Colony can be made more visible, and their character as parts of a network is further revealed.

At least 16 mission sites operated in the south-west of Western Australia between 1829 and 1879. Locations and periods of operation are shown in Figure 1, and an assessment of their archaeological potential is included in Table 1.

Table 1. Missions operating in the Southwest between 1829 and 1879.

Institution	Location	Standing Structures	Archaeological Potential
Mt Eliza Ration Depot and Native Institution	Mt Eliza, Perth	None	High: relatively undisturbed; also a Whadjuk Nyungar sacred site and Convict site
West Australian Missionary Society School	Middle Swan, Perth	Swan Cottage	High: site of former Mission buildings relatively undisturbed. Swan Cottage was built as a home for the first WAMS missionary and is extant; included on State Heritage Register (WA)
Perth Native School	Perth	None	Low: site redeveloped in 1896, although a filled-in well may be extant below current structures
Guildford Native School	Guildford	None	Low: partly or entirely run from Woodbridge House, entirely demolished and rebuilt in 1883
Fremantle Native School	Fremantle	Unknown	Location not yet identified
York Native School	York	Unknown	Location not yet identified
Albany Native School	Albany	Unknown	Medium: site now the location of private houses; lot boundaries remain the same
West Australian Missionary Society School	Upper Swan, Perth	All Saints Church	High: site in original condition and included on State Heritage Register (WA)
Wanneroo Mission Farm	Wanneroo, Perth	None	Moderate: post-Mission site use as vineyard and market garden, however approximately half of site sub-divided for suburban housing in 1975; also a Whadjuk Nyungar sacred site
New Norcia Mission	New Norcia	Multiple structures, all part of 'Benedictine Monastery Precinct'	High: long-term use of site as a Mission and on-going use as a monastery; included on State Heritage Register (WA)
Benevolent Institution	Perth and Fremantle	Children of Mary Chapel, Perth	Low: on-going use of Perth site as a private day and boarding school; Perth site included on State Heritage Register (WA), though most Benevolent Institution buildings now under a tennis court; former buildings at Fremantle entirely replaced
Lake Mollyalup Mission	Narrikup	None	High: no known post-Mission site use
Gerald Mission	York	Partial foundations and standing brick, stone and mud-brick walls	Moderate: post-Mission site use primarily as a farm, but sub-divided for suburban housing in 2004; also a Balardong Nyungar sacred site
Annesfield Native Institution	Albany	All Mission-period structures	Moderate: post-Mission site use as a private home up to the present; included on State Heritage Register (WA); also a Minang Nyungar sacred site
Perth Institution for Native and Half Caste Children	Perth	None	Low: extensive additions in 1939, demolished and replaced with high-rise offices at an unknown date
Vasse Institution for Native and Half Caste Children	Busselton	Unknown	Low: private ownership transferred in 1902, continued as a working farm until the present

Although the location within the landscape and spatial arrangement of these institutions varied, each represented an attempt by missionaries and the colonial administration of the Swan River Colony to control Nyungar adults and children. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all of the sites identified in Table 1 in detail. I demonstrate the application of a multimodal approach to researching the early missions of the Swan River Colony here with two mission sites. While these may not have the highest archaeological potential, together they provide an excellent opportunity to apply mixed methods, drawing on multiple records, to tell a story of the missions *and* their Nyungar inmates. These two institutions, run consecutively between 1833 and 1844, are discussed briefly below; the Mount Eliza

Ration Depot and Native Institution (1833–1834 and 1834–1838), and the Perth Native School (1840–1844). They are related geographically, and in terms of a continuity of both personnel and Nyungar inmates.

Mount Eliza Ration Depot and Mount Eliza Native Institution

This site was originally used as a depot for distributing rations to Nyungar people in the first days of the colony, then was developed for use as the first 'Native Institution'. The Mount Eliza Ration Depot was one of two ration depots established by the colonial government in Perth in 1833 to distribute food rations to local Nyungar people, the other

being located at Lake Monger (*Perth Gazette* 1833a: 34; Green 2009a: 355). Both Lake Monger (Galup) and Mount Eliza Bay (Goonininup) were, and continue to be, places of spiritual and resource significance to the local Whadjuk Nyungar people (Vinnicombe 1989: 23), and both locations were being used as residential nodes prior to the establishment of the Ration Depots. Captain Theophilus Tighe Ellis, a retired army officer, had been appointed as the Swan River Colony's Superintendent of Native Tribes in 1832, and was responsible for distributing rations at both depots. Ellis was also instrumental in capturing Midgegooroo for execution, in May 1833. After 1833, rations were no longer distributed at Galup, and many Nyungar families moved from there to Goonininup (Lyon 1833: 62).

The fresh water spring and river bank at Goonininup was out of sight of the town of Perth, behind Point Lewis (Figure 2), and in 1833 the road to the Point did not extend to Goonininup and the Mount Eliza Ration Depot (*Perth Gazette* 1833b: 68). The Ration Depot is included on the extreme periphery of the 1838 plan of Perth (Figure 3), and is not identified on this, or any other, map of the period. Barteaux (2016: 22) suggests that treating such maps as historical archaeological artefact assemblages can reveal much about how spaces were perceived and idealised. The invisibility of the Mount Eliza Ration Depot suited those colonists who advocated for the segregation of Nyungar people from colonial society, whether because of a desire to protect Nyungars themselves from the 'vices which have been imported from Europe' (*Perth Gazette* 1833a: 34), or more commonly, from a preference to keep

Whadjuk Nyungar people out of sight and out of mind (*Perth Gazette* 1833d: 162).

The Mount Eliza Ration Depot closed in October 1834 with Ellis' death as a result of an injury sustained at the punitive raid by mounted police and colonists on Pindjarup Nyungar at the Murray River, now known as the Pinjarra Massacre. Ellis had led the raid as the newly-appointed Principal Superintendent of Mounted Police, alongside James Stirling, the Colony's Governor. The Mount Eliza Ration Depot was re-established as the Mount Eliza Native Institution in the aftermath of the Pinjarra Massacre in December 1834 under the superintendence of Francis Fraser Armstrong.

Armstrong had emigrated to the Swan River Colony as a child with his family, and had learned some of the Whadjuk Nyungar language and customs from Nyungar people who frequented his father's property near Perth. Armstrong lived permanently at the Native Institution at Goonininup, alongside several Nyungar family groups who were based there for days and weeks at a time, and taught English and provided food and emergency medical care to the Nyungar residents. In 1835, a quarry utilizing Nyungar labour was established at the Native Institution (*Perth Gazette* 1835: 482), although its exact location is not now known.

The roles of servant and master formed in Britain were shifting by the 1820s and the culture of dissent among the servant class made its way to the Swan River Colony (Mazzarol 1978: 32–34). Coupled with the shortage of labour, this caused great demand for an obedient and cheap servant class (Crowley 1953; Burke 2016: 26). In 1838 one Perth

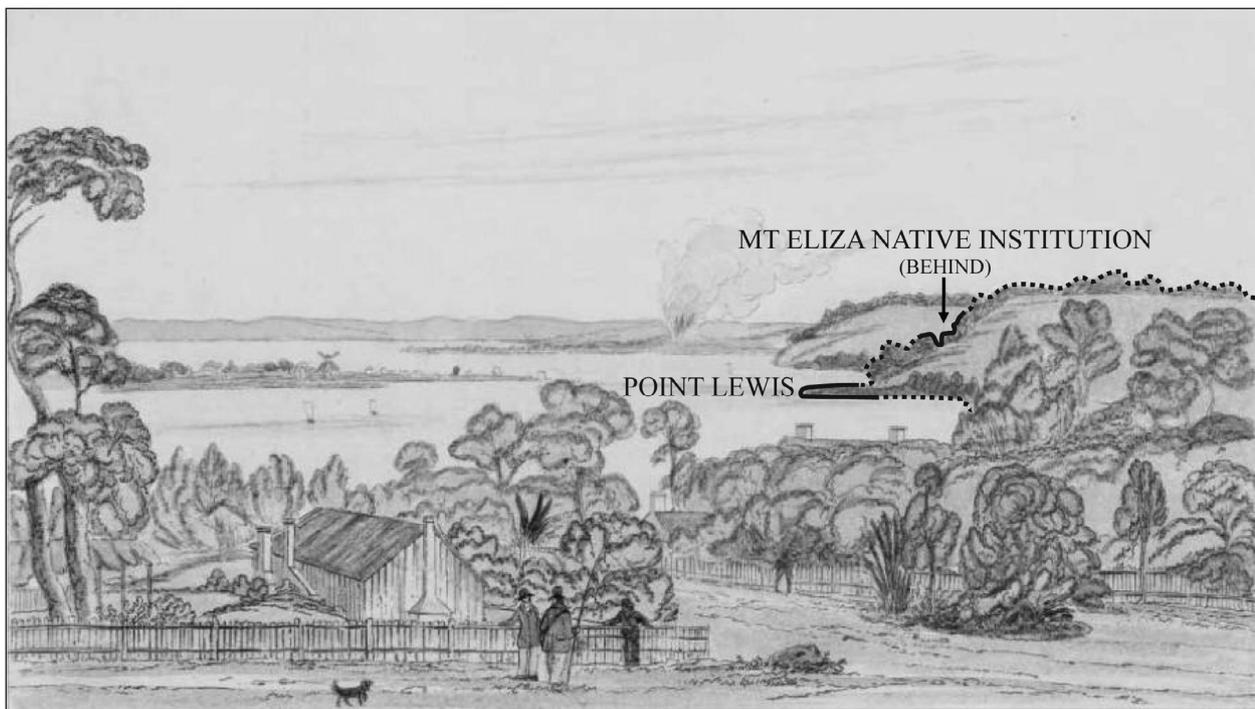


Figure 2. Location of Mount Eliza Ration Depot/Native Institution relative to Perth Town (detail based on Wittenoom 1839).

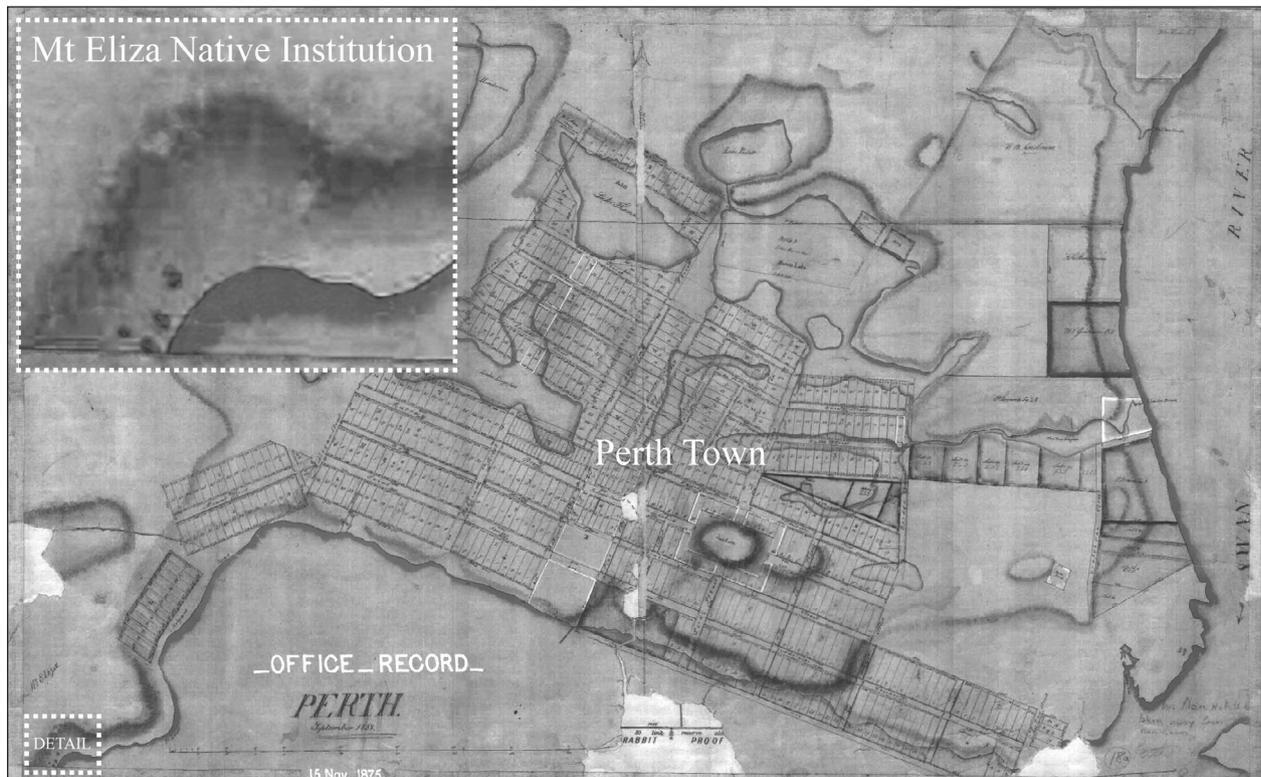


Figure 3. Only known plan of Mount Eliza Ration Depot/Native Institution (based on Hillman 1838b).

newspaper observed that ‘the natives are acquiring that sort of preliminary training which may be expected to be attended with very beneficial results, especially as regards the growing generation’ (*Perth Gazette* 1838: 167, my emphasis). A study of mission institutions in Western Australia must therefore also consider the extent to which Nyungar adult and child labour was coerced, and what role mission institutions played in providing labour for the colony.

Vegetable gardens were also established at the Native Institution, where Armstrong taught Nyungar people agricultural skills (*Perth Gazette* 1835: 482; Green 2009b: 682–83). The precise location of these vegetable gardens has also not been established (Vinnicombe 1989: 24).

The Mount Eliza Ration Depot and Native Institution, when assessed as a place, reveals certain institutional characteristics, but cannot be considered a ‘total institution’. Goffman (1968: 17) identifies the characteristics of a ‘total institution’ as follows;

All activities occur in the same place under the control of the same authority; Individuals are treated as part of a larger group, all of whom do the same things at the same time; Daily activities are tightly controlled chronologically, with a set schedule that is the same every day; and All enforced activities occur under a rational plan designed to achieve a specific aim.

The Mount Eliza Native Institution, while out of sight of Perth, was open to the Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River), and backed by Gargattup (Mount Eliza), a familiar and rich landscape for Nyungar inmates and visitors. The daily activities of Nyungar people attending the Mount Eliza Native Institution were not tightly controlled, although the aims of the institution – to encourage Nyungar participation in and reliance on the colonial economy – were explicit. Nyungar people maintained freedom of movement, but a certain level of coercive pressure (Winter 2017: 60) was exerted upon them to continue to associate with the institution, particularly in relation to promises of access to medical care and food, and protection from frontier violence (*Perth Gazette* 1834: 406). In this sense, the Mount Eliza institution cannot be considered entirely open, either. When considered in a landscape context, the Mount Eliza institution demonstrates the segregationist policies prevalent during that period in the Swan River Colony.

The short-lived Mount Eliza Native Institution was closed in October 1838. Green (2009b: 683) and Vinnicombe (1989: 25) both attribute the closure to the movement of Nyungar people away from the expanding town of Perth, although changes in colonial policy from a segregationist to an assimilationist treatment of First Nations people may also have contributed. The children of a number of Nyungar families who frequented the Mount Eliza Native Institution later became inmates of the Perth Native School, suggesting one way in which Nyungar people in

the Boorloo (Perth) region experienced the effects of such policy changes.

Although Goonininup is a registered Aboriginal Heritage Site, it is not identified as the location of the first mission institution in the Swan River Colony on the Aboriginal Heritage Register. The Goonininup site was later used as a Convict Depot, an Old Men's Home, and for infrastructure associated with the nearby Swan Brewery. The site is now a park comprised of 2 hectares of river flat at the northern end of the Old Swan Brewery Precinct. The former natural, fresh-water spring of Goonininup was piped and built up to become Kennedy Fountain in 1861 (HCWA 1992:8), and is situated at the park's northern end. The Goonininup site is a good candidate for archaeological excavation, and has the potential to reveal much about quarrying, gardening, and other economic and subsistence activities conducted by Nyungar people at the site, and also about missionising and colonising activities associated with the Native Institution and its successor institution, the Perth Native School.

Perth Native School

On 5 June 1840 the Wesleyan Methodist Minister John Smithies arrived in the Swan River Colony. He was the Colony's first religious Minister. Armstrong, also a devout Wesleyan, met Smithies at Fremantle, and took him the several miles up the Swan River to the town of Perth.

By the end of June 1840 Smithies and Armstrong had opened a residential mission in Perth, known as the Perth Native School, to house, teach, train, and Christianise Nyungar children. Many of the Nyungar children who

had, along with their families, been regular visitors at the Mount Eliza Native Institution subsequently became inmates of the Perth Native School. Not all these children were members of families who occupied the immediate vicinity of Boorloo (Perth), so it is possible that factors beyond mere geographical proximity contributed to their incorporation in the mission.

The Perth Native School was located on Lot G20, on the west side of William Street, between Hay and Murray Streets, in central Perth (Hillman 1838a), and next to the Subscription Chapel, built in 1836 by the Perth Wesleyan Methodist congregation as their place of worship.

A fluctuating number of approximately 30 Nyungar children at least as young as four (Hallam & Tilbrook 1990:182) were institutionalised at the Perth Native School between 1840 and 1844. Initially, all the children slept at Institution House, Armstrong's private home, on the site of the former Mount Eliza Native Institution (*Perth Gazette* 1841:3; McNair & Rumley 1981:42; Rikkens 1984:73). Some time during 1841, the female children began living in Smithies' home, the 'Mission House' (Scott 1924), shown in Figure 4 as the bungalow with verandah at left. In 1842, the male children were transferred from Armstrong's home to join the girls (Rikkens 1984:73). The Subscription Chapel (Figure 5) became dormitory accommodation to house the male and female children (Scott 1924).

Smithies and Armstrong claimed that the Nyungar children of the Perth Native School had been voluntarily given into their care (*Perth Gazette* 1841:3) and were happy and contented (McNair & Rumley 1981:69–70). However, the parents were not free to reclaim their children from

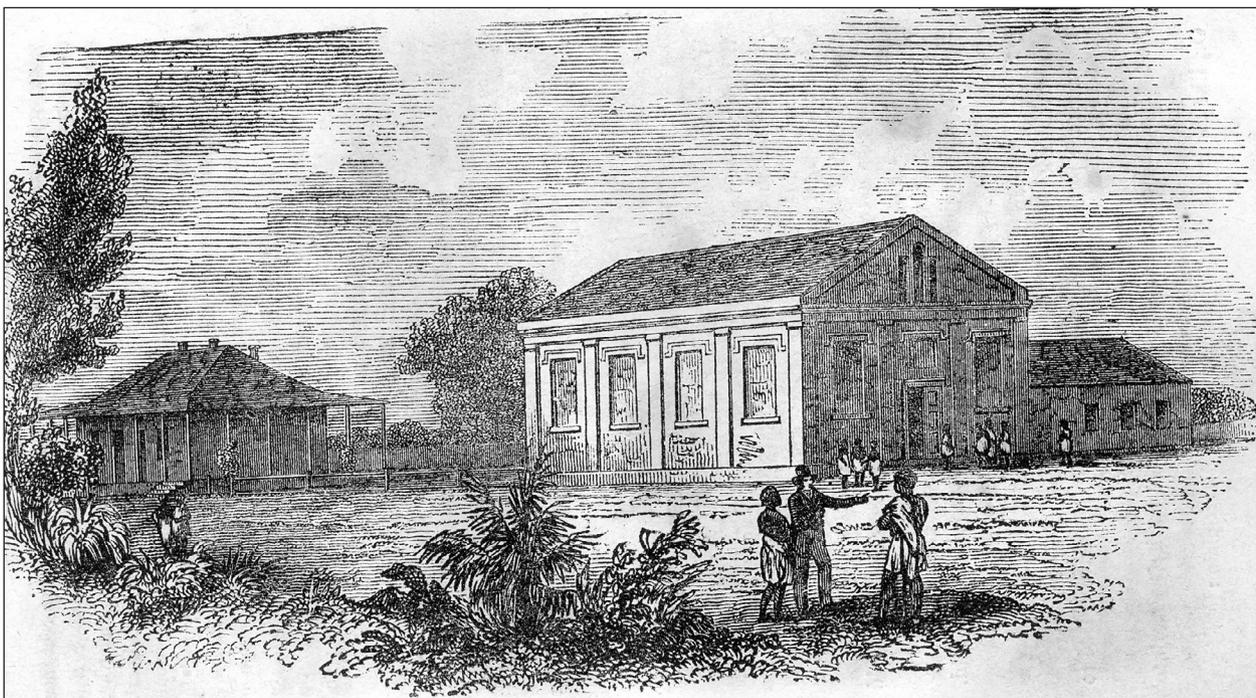


Figure 4. Perth Native School and Centenary Chapel, ca 1842 (engraving courtesy Uniting Church in the City Archives).

the School, and the number of children ‘absconding’ (in the terminology of the *Master and Servant Act*) from the School belie their happiness and contentment, as does the level of surveillance that was increasingly brought to bear to ‘manage’ (*Perth Gazette* 1841: 3) and control the children.

A contemporaneous plan of Perth’s wells shows a well located on Lot G19, next door to the Perth Native School (Gregory 1847). This lot was owned by James Inkpen, who was a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Committee. It is very likely this well was the primary source of water for the Perth Native School.

By March 1840 the *Perth Gazette* was advocating for ‘a watchful guard’ over the movements of Nyungar people in and around Perth (*Perth Gazette* 1840a: 27). When the Perth Native School commenced in June the same year, surveillance of the Nyungar child inmates was a central intention. This surveillance was both physical, in monitoring and controlling the movements of the inmates through Perth town, and moral, in the control exerted over the bodies, actions, and spiritual worlds of the children. Surveillance of the Perth Native School inmates was at times explicit, with Perth settlers asked through the newspapers to assist the colonial police and missionaries in ‘managing’ the students, reporting ‘misconduct’, and sending ‘loitering’ children back to Armstrong and Smithies (*Perth Gazette* 1841: 3). The ‘clean appearance and respectful conduct’ of the Perth Native School inmates was also widely noted

whenever the children appeared at public events (*Perth Gazette* 1840b: 2).

Perth Native School inmates attended school for two hours in the afternoon each week day (*Perth Gazette* 1841: 3), and for the remainder of the weekday hours were sent out to domestic service in the homes of Perth settlers, if considered old enough to work. ‘Misconduct’ in the sphere of settlers’ private homes was also monitored by Armstrong and Smithies (*Perth Gazette* 1841: 3). By exposing these Nyungar children to the private domestic lives of Perth settlers, it was hoped they would become enculturated to European modes of living, and thus ‘improved’ and ‘civilised’ (*Inquirer* 1840: 59; *Perth Gazette* 1841: 3).

The urban grid was a deliberate and central strategy of British colonisation policy, intended in part to exert a civilizing influence over the former wildness of the colonised place (Proudfoot 2000: 12). Thus the physical layout of Perth town itself can be seen as a macrocosm of the same principles that Armstrong and Smithies were exerting on the Nyungar child inmates of the Perth Native School, who were expected by the Perth settler public to relinquish their ‘wildness’ and ‘savage freedom’ for the settlers’ ‘civilized ways’ (*Inquirer* 1840: 59; *Perth Gazette* 1840b: 2).

The placement of Nyungar child domestic servants throughout Perth town is represented in Figure 6. Nyungar children as young as five were moving daily under the gaze of colonists and missionaries between the Perth Native



Figure 5. Former Subscription Chapel/Perth Native School premises, ca 1896 (photo courtesy Uniting Church in the City Archives).

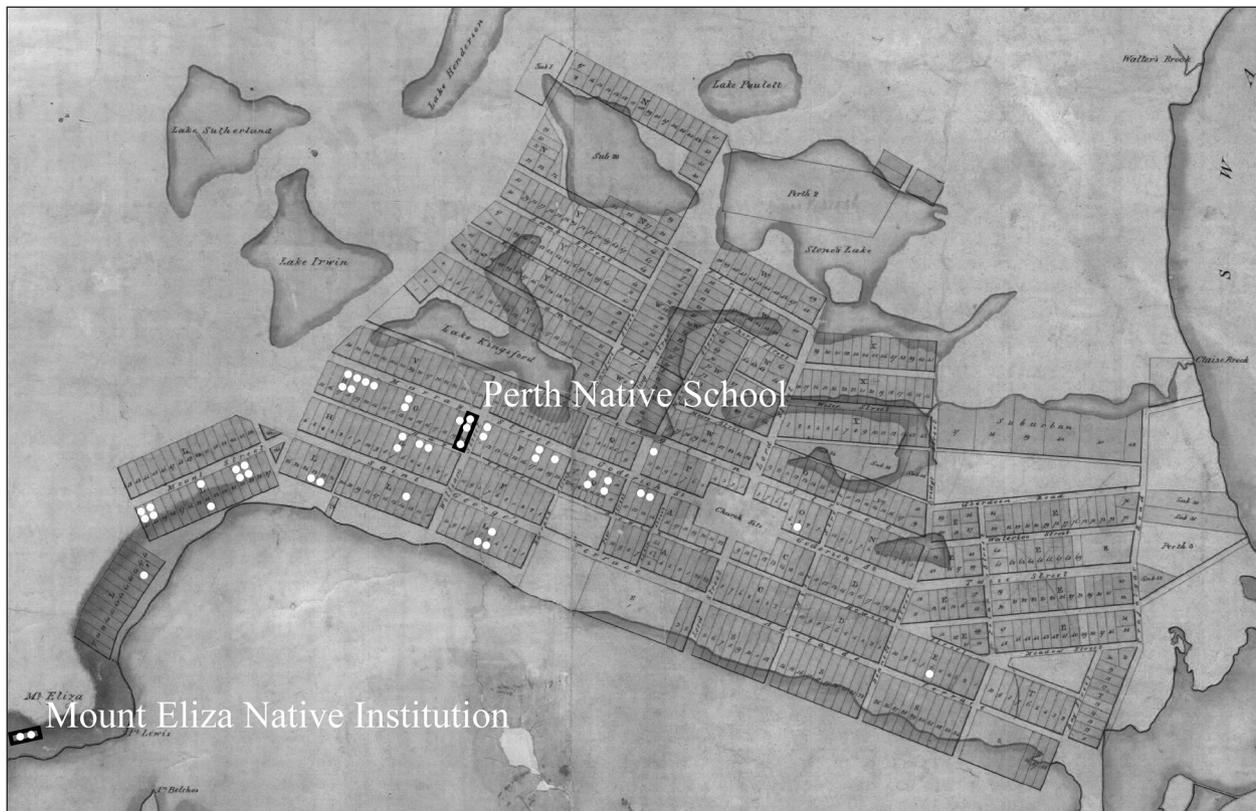


Figure 6. Homes of settlers where Nyungar children were living and working in 1840–42 (detail based on Hillman 1838a).

School, Institution House at Goonininup, and throughout the urban grid of Perth town. It is therefore possible to understand the entire colonial town between 1840 and 1844 as a mission site.

Green suggests the primary aim of the Perth Native School was to educate and Christianise the Nyungar child inmates (1984: 155), but Hetherington instead attributes the establishment of the Perth Native School ‘as part of an arrangement to provide Aboriginal children as servants and labourers’ (1992: 47–48). It is clear from the number of children sent into domestic service throughout Perth town at the time that the Nyungar child inmates of the Perth Native School were a source of unfree labour for the Swan River Colony prior to the introduction of convict labour in 1850 (Hetherington 1992; Swartz 2019).

In 1844 the Perth Native School relocated to a rural site 14 kilometres north of Boorloo (Perth), and became known instead as the Wanneroo Mission Farm (Green 1984: 154; McNair & Rumley 1981: 85). It has not yet been possible to establish with certainty whether the Nyungar children of the Perth Native School sent to work throughout Perth town remained in their situations or also moved to Wanneroo, although it is likely that most moved with the mission, and some remained in service in Perth. The mission farm at Wanneroo, and its successors, were comparable to the ‘experimental farm’ or ‘mission station’ model common in other British colonies (see e.g. Birmingham 1992;

Birmingham & Wilson 2010; Griffin 2010; Lydon 2009a; Lydon 2009b).

The particular institutional characteristics of the Perth Native School are revealed through applying Goffman’s (1968: 17) rubric. To the extent that the town of Perth and the private homes of settlers can be considered to form part of the mission, all mission activities do occur in the same ‘place’, and under the control of the same authority. Nyungar child inmates of the Perth Native School were treated as one homogenous group, with their activities and movements tightly controlled. All the efforts of the mission were designed to control and enculturate Nyungar children in European life ways and morality, and arguably also to engender reliance on the colonial society and economy, creating a ready resource of unfree labour. Characteristically for a closed institution (Winter 2017: 60), coercive pressure was exerted upon the children through the cooperative surveillance of Perth society, with carceral sanctions brought to bear on those who resisted. As an element of the colonial landscape, the Perth Native School was representative of colonising strategies that centred on assimilation.

No evidence remains of the former Perth Native School at the site today. The extant Wesleyan Church was constructed in 1870 on the southern end of Lot G20 (Uniting Church in the City 2020). The Centenary Chapel, Subscription Chapel, and Mission House bungalow that together comprised the Perth Native School in 1840–1844

(Scott 1924) were demolished and replaced with Queens Buildings in 1898 (HCWA 2004: 6). Queens Buildings is today occupied by retail outlets, and is neither accessible for archaeological investigation nor likely to yield interesting results, due to nearly 175 intervening years of urban development. However it is possible that evidence of the well located on Lot G19 and used by the Perth Native School may have survived beneath Queens Buildings into the present.

CONCLUSION

In a progression familiar in other Australian colonies (e.g. Harris 1990; Middleton 2010, 2018; Mitchell 2011), urban surveillance and assimilation of First Nations people gave way to agrarian ‘experimental farm’ projects, informed by colonial perceptions of the civilising effects of forced sedentism on First Nations peoples (Harris 1990: 279; Swartz 2019: 74).

The ostensibly humanitarian civilising project undertaken by the Swan River Colony missions of the period relied on the large-scale separation of Nyungar children from their families, and their religious and cultural indoctrination into Christian and European norms. Preliminary research has identified over 500 individual Nyungar children and young adults who became inmates of one or more of the 16 missions mentioned here; a significant proportion of the Nyungar population of this period, by any reckoning.

The continuity of Nyungar individuals associated with the partially coercive Mount Eliza institutions to the closed total institution of the Perth Native School is one example of how biographical information can be used to uncover a network between places. Where archaeological potential is higher, such as in the case of the Mount Eliza institutions, WAMS Schools, Wanneroo Mission Farm, Lake Mollyalup Mission, Gerald Mission, Annesfield, and Vasse Institution (Table 1), archaeological investigation is recommended to address a significant knowledge gap. In the case of institutions where the archaeological potential is low or absent, such as with the Perth Native School, Guildford Native School, Albany Native School and others, the archival record can be utilized to mitigate the dearth in the material record. The networked character of the mission places discussed in this article can be revealed through these complementary methods, and through understanding the ways these mission places occupied the landscape and were constituted spatially.

As mentioned above, while Goonininup is a registered Aboriginal Heritage Site, the Mount Eliza Ration Depot and Mount Eliza Native Institution are not. Indeed, of the 16 mission sites I identify here (Table 1), while 13 are within the curtilage of one or more Aboriginal Heritage Sites (DPLH 2020), only two include heritage values relating to the mission at the location as part of their heritage listing (Lake Goollelal/Wanneroo Mission Farm and Camfield House/Annesfield). This suggests the false dichotomy between First Nations and settler heritage is still active in

relation to mission sites in the south-west in this period. The extent to which this contributes to the erasure of early mission places in Western Australia is worthy of further investigation.

Acknowledgements

This paper was researched and written about and on Whadjuk Nyungar Country, and I would like to thank my Cultural Supervisors Kevin Fitzgerald and Gail Beck for guiding my research. Special thanks to Sean Winter, Alistair Paterson, Jane Lydon, and Len Collard, whose thoughtful editorial assistance greatly improved this paper, and to the two anonymous reviewers whose helpful suggestions led me to strengthen and clarify some weak points in my argument. I would like to acknowledge Mark Chambers, without whose generous assistance in navigating the archives of the Swan River Colony I would have been lost. Thanks also to Neville Green, whose immense and valuable body of research on Nyungar history contributed important detail, and to Helen Runciman and Ella Vivian-Williams, whose research on the Mount Eliza site inspired me to take a closer look.

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