



## REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

### 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

#### PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.7 Establishing communications
- 5.1 Working in harsh conditions

#### HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 210 Telecommunications
- 306 Domestic activities
- 309 Technology & technological change

#### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\*

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is fine example of a Federation Bungalow style residence valued for the use of local limestone, and the pleasing scale and proportion of the building. (Criterion 1.1)

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is a significant cultural element in the remote regional landscape of the Eyre coast. (Criterion 1.4)

#### 11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

From 1897 to 1927, *Eyre Bird Observatory* was a repeater station on the East-West Telegraph line, established in 1877, linking Western Australia with the eastern states and overseas through Adelaide. (Criteria 2.1 & 2.2)

*Eyre Bird Observatory* was constructed at a time when the gold finds in the State had resulted in greatly increased telegraph traffic requiring more staff and larger station buildings, and replaced the original timber telegraph station (1877). (Criterion 2.2)

*Eyre Bird Observatory* was an isolated government outpost in a very remote district, which served the needs of both the Government and the scattered population, with the Telegraph Master at Eyre filling a number of roles, including Customs Officer, Meteorological Observer and Landing Waiter. (Criterion 2.2)

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is associated with expirree James Fleming who was involved in construction of the first private telegraph lines in the State in 1869-

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

1872 and, as Superintendent of the Post and Telegraph Department, oversaw construction of the WA section of the East West line, 1875-1877. (Criterion 2.3)

*Eyre Bird Observatory* was designed by the PWD under Chief Architect George Temple Poole, who was responsible for many fine buildings in the State during a period of growth from 1885 to 1896. (Criterion 2.3)

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is associated with the telegraph men and their families, who worked and lived on the line between 1877 and 1927, particularly William Graham, who was Telegraph Master at Eyre from 1877 to 1903, with his wife Emily and their eleven children. (Criterion 2.3)

*Eyre Bird Observatory* has been occupied by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union since 1978, providing a scientific research and education function in the place, which is internationally recognised, and operating a successful starling trapping program. (Criterion 1.3)

### **11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

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### **11.4 SOCIAL VALUE**

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is valued by the general community as a reminder of the early telecommunications history of the State and of the isolated and harsh conditions under which those associated with the place lived and worked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Criteria 4.1 & 4.2)

The East-West Telegraph line, of which *Eyre Bird Observatory* was an element, is valued by the Institution of Engineers Australia, WA Division, who have declared the line an engineering landmark, and by Australia Post who have assisted in the establishment of museums of local telegraph history at Eyre and Eucla. (Criteria 4.1 & 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12.1 RARITY**

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### **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is a representative example of a Federation Bungalow style of a regional telegraph office designed by George Temple Poole and established in 1897. (Criterion 6.1)

### **12.3 CONDITION**

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is in fair to good condition. It is maintained on a regular basis, although major projects such as verandah restoration, are limited by financial resources.

### **12.4 INTEGRITY**

*Eyre Bird Observatory* originally provided a residential and telegraph office function. While it has not been used as a telegraph office since 1927, and has been vacant for most of the intervening years, the place has been occupied again in a residential capacity since 1977, with minimal alterations to the structure to accommodate that function. The place has a high degree of integrity.

## 12.5 AUTHENTICITY

There is significant evidence of the original fabric of *Eyre Bird Observatory*, except for the timber elements of the place, including all framework, floors, doors and windows, which had been removed in 1927 and were replaced with new timberwork in the late 1970s to make the place useable. It has a moderate degree of authenticity.

## 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray, Conservation Consultant.

Proposed curtilage is marked on the accompanying site diagram.

### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is a substantial limestone building constructed in 1897 as a combined telegraph station and residence on the East-West Telegraph line. The place ceased to be used in this function in 1927 and was unoccupied for around forty years. During this period, much of the original timber in the place was removed. In 1977, the place was restored for use by the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union and the Post Office Historical Society. It currently functions as *Eyre Bird Observatory*, an internationally recognised place, which is open to the public for short stays, activities and courses, and includes a museum of the buildings early telegraph station history.

The first telegraph message in the world was sent on 24 May 1844, using Morse code, a system of dots and dashes that represented letters of the alphabet. The system was invented by Samuel Morse, inspired by the fact that when his wife died in 1825, he did not hear of the event until days after her funeral, due to the slowness of communications at the time. The first telegraph line in Australia was constructed in 1854, between Melbourne and the Victorian port of Williamstown. Telegraphy was the major form of distant communication for the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

The first telegraph line in Western Australia was erected between Fremantle and Perth in 1869, by the privately owned Western Australian Telegraph Company. In 1870, a second company, the Electro-Magnetic Telegraph (EMT) Company, arranged with the Government to establish telegraph lines south to Albany and Bunbury, and east to York, through Guildford, Toodyay and Northam. The EMT Company acquired the WA Telegraph Company in 1871. The Post Office Department, renamed Post and Telegraph Department, supplied staff and buildings on the EMT Company constructed lines. Guildford telegraph station was opened on 23 December 1871 and the rest of the stations followed with the last, Albany, opening a year later, on 28 December 1872. On 1 January 1873, the Government bought out the EMT Company and became the sole operator of the Colony's telegraph system.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Book of Knowledge*, Grolier Inc, USA, 1982, Vol. 12, p. 462; *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Grolier Society of Australia, Sydney, 1983, Vol. 10, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'Inauguration of the Electric Telegraph in Western Australia, 1869', 5 pages, Perth, [1936]; Moynihan, J. F., 'Some brief notes on owners and operators of early telegraph lines in Western Australia, 1869-1873, 5 pages, Perth, 1981, PR11168; Stirling, Edmund, 'A brief history of the first establishment and development of the Electric Telegraph in Western Australia', [1897], National Archives of Australia, File K1209, Folder 22, Eucla; *The Eucla Report*, researched and written by L. J. Hanley, Officer in Charge,

James Coates Fleming, an expirée, supervised construction of the Perth-Fremantle telegraph line and was 'Superintendent' for the EMT Company. On 1 January 1873, he was appointed the first Superintendent of Telegraphs with the Post and Telegraph Department. Fleming was accepted as a full member of the London Society of Engineers in 1878.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time that Western Australia was establishing its first telegraph lines, a line was being constructed from Adelaide to Darwin to join the undersea telegraph cable, which had been laid from Britain to Java some years earlier. The Adelaide-Darwin line was completed in 1872, and the eastern states capital cities, already connected by telegraph, were then linked with the rest of the world. Western Australia was still reliant on information by sea, a matter that was becoming of concern in business circles as the benefits of the telegraph system became apparent.<sup>4</sup>

In 1873, construction of the Perth-Geraldton telegraph line was under way, and, with all existing lines operating well, plans were made to link Perth with Adelaide. It was November 1874 before the South Australian legislature authorised the expenditure for that State's section of the line to Eucla, which had been chosen as the natural connecting point due to it having the only sea landing place for hundreds of miles. Eucla was situated twelve kilometres west of the South Australian border.<sup>5</sup>

A survey of the coast for other safe harbourage during construction of the line was not undertaken by the West Australian Government, who relied on John Forrest's exploratory journey of 1870 to provide the relevant information. This made costing the work difficult, and none of the first tenders was accepted, being higher than the estimate. The work was then rearranged. The Government purchased the wire, insulators and fittings from a London supplier and James Fleming negotiated with tenderer John Joseph Elsegood for shipping of the wire and insulators and the wiring work. Elsegood was also awarded the contract for the shipping and erection of the prefabricated station buildings. Separate tenders were called for other aspects of the work. William Spencer of Bunbury won the contract to supply the poles, which he subcontracted to timber mills at Lockeville and Quindalup; James G. Flindell of Toodyay won the contract for clearing the route and erecting the poles; and Captain W. W. Miles was awarded the job of shipping the materials and supplies.<sup>6</sup>

The first pole for the line was planted by Governor Frederick Weld at Albany on 1 January 1875. Jonathan Parish, foreman for the Post and Telegraph Department, surveyed the country for ten to twenty miles ahead of the contractors, pegging out the route. From Culham Inlet, Parish's work was taken over by a survey party under Charles Denver Price, assisted by Surveyor H. S. Carey. The line followed the coast, and materials were transported by sea. Landing was difficult due to the steep cliffs and rough seas of the Great Australian Bight. The telegraph poles were lashed together and floated ashore, while the wire and other materials, and food and water

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Commonwealth Archives Office, Perth, 1968, National Archives of Australia, File K30, 1967/24, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'Inauguration...', op cit; Moynihan, J. F., 'Some brief notes...', op cit; Erickson, Rica, *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Perth, UWA Press, 1988, p. 1073.

<sup>4</sup> *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph, 1875-7', *Early Days*, Vol. 2 Pt 13, 1933, pp. 16-35.

<sup>6</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph...', op cit; Institution of Engineers, Australia, WA Division, *East-West Telegraph: National engineering landmark commemorative plaque unveiling ceremony*, 12 pages, [Perth], 2001.

for the construction teams, had to be landed. The country was largely barren and dry with no permanent water for hundreds of miles. Portable condensers mounted on carts placed in the sea were in constant use in some sections.<sup>7</sup>

James Fleming made frequent trips to oversee construction and install equipment at the stations. During construction of the line, the *Mary Ann*, *Twilight* and *Catabunup* (also known as *Bunyip*) were wrecked while transporting materials. No lives were lost in the shipwrecks, but Fleming was aboard the *Mary Ann* at the time. After the accident, he walked forty miles to a homestead on the Thomas River, where he acquired horses and rode to Esperance, joining another group there to travel overland to Perth.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the soft iron wire used for the line, which had poor conductivity characteristics, and the great distances and detrimental effect on the signal of the ocean mists, the line required repeater stations along the route, where operators would manually boost the messages in transit. Stations were opened at Bremer Bay (8 March 1876), Esperance Bay (8 September 1876), Israelite Bay (5 December 1876), and Eyre's Sand Patch (17 July 1877). A proposed station at Point Culver, to be called Weld Station, was not constructed, as the site was considered unsuitable.<sup>9</sup> Eyre's Sand Patch was chosen as a site because explorers Edward Eyre (1841) and John Forrest (1870) had both sunk successful wells in the area. Forrest called his camp at the site 'Wunundah'.<sup>10</sup>

The East-West Telegraph line reached Eucla on 8 December 1877 and was opened the following day, the South Australian section having been opened to Eucla since August 1877.<sup>11</sup> The length of the line from Albany to Eucla was 1,207 kilometres, and from Adelaide to Eucla, it was 1,221 kilometres. There were 18,300 timber poles, 100mm-square, spaced 14 per kilometre in the West Australian section, and 12,474 iron poles spaced at 10 per kilometre in the South Australian section. South Australia also constructed four repeater stations along the length of its line.<sup>12</sup>

The telegraph stations were manned by a Telegraph Master, (also referred to as a Station Master), and one or more assistants. The Telegraph Masters were the major government official in their respective districts, and acted in other positions including Resident Magistrate, Customs Officer, Meteorological Observer and Landing Waiter. A 'Landing Waiter' appears to have acted as a harbour master when one was not appointed, as at Broome c.1900-1903; in larger ports, a harbour master may have been assisted by a Landing Waiter. A Landing Waiter could also act as Customs Officer, which he did at *Eyre Bird Observatory*, and probably also as Tidal Waiter, if he were the only port official.<sup>13</sup>

Linemen were employed to maintain the telegraph wire, with an Aboriginal assistant in the early years. The linemen were stationed at each of the telegraph stations and patrolled halfway to the next station on each side. In

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<sup>7</sup> *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 1; Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit.

<sup>8</sup> *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 1; Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit.

<sup>9</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit.

<sup>10</sup> Section of map of the area, 1902, National Archives file PP554/1, 51, Eyre Telegraph Station.

<sup>11</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit.

<sup>12</sup> Institution of Engineers, Australia, WA Division, op cit; Plan of Esperance Bay-Eucla telegraph line, Sheet 7, GWS WSD 1383, SROWA.

<sup>13</sup> Blue Books, 1886, 1892; *Yearbook of Western Australia*, 1910, p. 80.

1876, the Postmaster General had authorised the provision of small, prefabricated huts of 'galvanised sheet on a wood frame' to be erected along the line for the use of the linemen, and where tools, stores and rations could be kept. Linemen were provided with camels and bicycles for travelling.<sup>14</sup> To provide water for the linemen between Israelite Bay and Eucla, catchment sheds with tanks were established at a number of points. The catchment sheds comprised an iron roof on an open timber frame, and were used by the linemen for shelter.<sup>15</sup>

The early telegraph station buildings were erected as each place was reached. They consisted of small weatherboard houses of four rooms, each 11 feet by 9 feet (3.35m x 2.74m), around a central passage.<sup>16</sup> Cooking and washing was apparently done outside in bush shelters. The Eucla Telegraph Station was twice the size of the other station buildings, as it had to house the staff of both the Western Australian and South Australian offices.<sup>17</sup>

The 1877 telegraph station at Eyre's Sand Patch was occupied by Telegraph Master William Graham and his wife Emily, with their four daughters and two sons. William Graham was appointed in July 1877, and remained at Eyre until his retirement in 1903. During this time, he and his wife had another two daughters and three sons. The growing family required larger premises, and a kitchen was added in 1888, by R. Honey, at a cost of £55.<sup>18</sup> The chimney on the station building was also a later addition. A light was always kept burning at night at the Eyre station and in the 1890s, this must have been seen with relief and joy by many a prospector from the eastern states who had set out to walk to Coolgardie.<sup>19</sup>

William Graham had been Post and Telegraph Master at Kadina, in South Australia, before resigning to join the West Australian department. He is reported as passing through Esperance in May 1877, with his assistant Harry Sutcliffe of Pinjarra, on his way to open the station at Eyre.<sup>20</sup> Another report, by Thomas Brown of Nullabor Station and recorded in a paper presented to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia in 1917-1918, states that William Graham claimed to have been sent to Eyre with a gang, mostly convicts, to help in construction of the line. This is considered unlikely and is not born out by any other report on construction of the line, including that of George P. Stevens, Telegraph Master at Eucla and later Manager of the Telegraph Department.<sup>21</sup> William Graham was known as 'Iron-Man Graham'. He is reputed to have ridden a bicycle from Israelite Bay to Eyre, a distance of about 320 kilometres through sand and scrub and to have regularly visited supply ships riding at anchor and then swum a kilometre or so back to shore.

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14 'Eucla Telegraph Station', report by the Postmaster General, 13 July 1876, National Archives File K1209, Folder 2, Eucla; Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit; photograph, telegraph lineman near Eucla, 1910-1920, Batty 000813D.

15 *West Australian*, 13 May 1895, p. 6, letter to the editor on the condition of the Eucla telegraph line; National Archives file K273, 1927/5, Balladonia, disposal of catchment sheds.

16 *West Australian Government Gazette*, Index, 1875-1888; Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit.

17 Photograph of Old Eucla Telegraph Station, 1890s, National Archives File K1209, Folder 4, Eucla Post Office.

18 *West Australian Government Gazette*, 1888, p. 209; sketch of Eyre Telegraph Station (1877), National Archive file K1209, Folder 1, Eyre Post Office.

19 Oldham, R. & J., *George Temple-Poole: Architect of the golden years 1885-1897*, p. 170.

20 Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit.

21 *The Eucla Report*, op cit, pp. 5-6; Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit.

Riding a bicycle for hundreds of miles through sand and scrub was not unusual at the time. The telegraph linemen were equipped with bicycles, as well as camels, and bicycling messengers were common on the goldfields before the advent of rail. While the stories credit this particular ride to William Graham, the *Eucla Recorder* reported on 26 May 1900, that Graham's son, J. W. W. Graham, had just returned by bicycle from Israelite.<sup>22</sup>

William Graham bred and raced horses, and his family were fluent in the language of the Mirning, the local Aboriginal group. While William Graham was hard on himself, he was also hard on his children. His second youngest child, Jessie, born in 1883, remembers being sent off at the age of five with her seven-year-old brother to look after the horses several kilometres from the station. They spent the night in fear on the stable roof when hungry dingoes were attracted by the smell of mutton fat and emu oil used on a leather saddle to keep it supple. The dingoes tore the saddle to pieces and the children were beaten by their father for their carelessness. William Graham later purchased Madura station and the children helped in construction of the homestead.<sup>23</sup>

At least three of Graham's daughters married telegraph men, including George Stevens, Telegraph Master at Eucla 1886 to 1895, who married Annie Graham. Michael Ryan, who succeeded Stevens, married another of Graham's daughters, as did WA telegraphist Farrant. Graham's son, J. W. W. Graham, took up 60,000 acres of pastoral land in the area around Eyre.<sup>24</sup> In 1882, large Reserves for public purposes were gazetted around the telegraph stations on the route. Reserve 522A at Eyre was 150 acres in size.<sup>25</sup> There was little telegraphic traffic on the East-West line initially, and the single wire, which could only carry one message each way, was sufficient for the time. By the 1890s, however, gold discoveries had greatly increased telegraphic business. Delays of up to a week were common as a backlog of messages developed at each station. As well as improvements in the telegraphic system, larger premises were required to accommodate expanded operations and staff numbers.<sup>26</sup>

In 1896, a two-strand telegraph line, strung with copper wire on iron poles, was constructed from the coastal line at Esperance to Coolgardie, passing through Norseman on the Dundas Goldfield, and a similar line was put through direct from Eucla, through Eyre's Sand Patch, to Norseman. Norseman was situated about halfway between Coolgardie and Esperance, and a telegraph station was situated there, with a booster station at Balladonia, halfway between Eyre and Norseman. New technology introduced at this time allowed two messages to be carried each way per wire

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22 Thomas, G., 'The story of William Graham', National Archives file, K30, 196/24; *Eucla Recorder*, 26 May 1900, p. 4.

23 Thomas, G., op cit; Oral history of Jessie Burnett (nee Graham), OH 918.

24 Lawrence J., *Perth-Adelaide Telegraph Link: 1877*, J. Lawrence, 1945, typescript. Lawrence was an operator at Eucla in 1897; Jeffery, Chris, *Eucla: Paper for the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, 23 February 1979, typescript.

25 *West Australian Government Gazette*, 1882, pp. 43-44; 1902 map of the area with Reserve 522A marked, National Archives File PP554/1, 51, Eyre Post Office.

26 Notes by G. Compton Spencer, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 15, Eucla Post Office; 'Eucla, Ancient and Modern', *Transmitter*, 16 March 1898, typescript copy, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 2, Eucla Post Office; Memories of Jim Hancock, op cit.

(quadruplex system), so that the existing coastal line and the new inland line were able to handle the greater load of telegraphic traffic.<sup>27</sup>

A plan for new telegraph station buildings was prepared by the PWD in 1896, under Chief Architect George Temple Poole. A contract for construction of Eyre's Sand Patch Telegraph Station was awarded to Walter Harrison. The acceptance of his tender of £2,215-18-8 was gazetted on 11 June 1897.<sup>28</sup> Harrison also built the Balladonia Telegraph Station on the Eyre-Norseman line in 1898.<sup>29</sup> He was a stonemason and builder who lived and worked in the Albany area. In partnership with James Hamilton, he built a number of public buildings, including Albany Town Hall and Courthouse and Breaksea Lighthouse quarters.<sup>30</sup>

The PWD plans were varied to suit the conditions and working requirements of each station. Because there was considered little need for postal facilities at Eyre, the Telegraph Office and battery room were placed on one side of the building, with the remainder of the place occupied by the Telegraph Master's quarters.<sup>31</sup> In 1898, a new fireplace and chimney were constructed in the old telegraph office.<sup>32</sup>

Log books of the Eucla telegraph station for 1898 to 1905 do not mention the Eyre Station in the daily transmission lists, indicating that it was most likely of secondary importance, probably serving as a repeater station only when adverse conditions impeded traffic flow on the line. The telegraph staff at Eucla was small, generally numbering only three or four. In 1907, automatic boosting on the Line was introduced, and the staff at all the telegraph stations was reduced. In 1927, a new three-strand telegraph line was constructed along the route of the Trans-Australia Railway, and the telegraph stations on the coastal and Norseman lines were closed. The line ceased to operate on 26 March 1927, 'give or take a day or two either way' as traffic passed over both lines for several days during the changeover.<sup>33</sup>

The telegraph lines, no longer required by the Government, continued to be used and maintained by the pastoral stations along their length, for their private telephone service.<sup>34</sup> In 1927, following the closure of the telegraph stations, the place was bought by Harry Dimer, a pastoralist of Rawlinna. The entry in the *Commonwealth Gazette* states:

Disposal of postal property at Eyre, all that piece of land in district of Nuruna, containing about 10 acres and being a square block of land with the Post Office building at its centre.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the timber from the Eyre Station was removed, including floorboards, window and doorframes and some roof timbers. Harry Dimer

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<sup>27</sup> Notes by G. Compton Spencer, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 15, Eucla Post Office; Jeffery, Chris, *Eucla: Paper for the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, 23 February 1979, typescript.

<sup>28</sup> *West Australian Government Gazette*, 11 June 1897, p. 1135.

<sup>29</sup> *West Australian Government Gazette*, 11 June 1897, p. 1135.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, Rica, *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Perth, UWA Press, 1988, p. 1384.

<sup>31</sup> Floor plan of Eyre station.

<sup>32</sup> PWD *Annual Report*, 1898, In *Votes & Proceedings of Parliament*, Paper 52, p. 98.

<sup>33</sup> Information of telegraphist R. Pitcher, 1966, National Archives file K1209, Folder 15, Eucla.

<sup>34</sup> Telephone conversation with Harvey Gurney, Moopina Station, 20 September 2002.

<sup>35</sup> *Commonwealth Gazette*, 11 October 1928, p. 2823, from National Archives File PP212/1, O/17/34, Balladonia.



was considered responsible for the removal, but his brother, R. Dimer, has stated that Harry only removed the outbuildings, and that some of this material was used to build a house at Emu Point Tank.<sup>36</sup> The outbuildings were the 1877 station building and possibly the 1888 kitchen.<sup>37</sup>

The Eyre Telegraph Station remained unoccupied until at least the 1960s.<sup>38</sup>

In 1965, the West Australian government created the Nuytsland Nature Reserve, which covered the area occupied by the Station building. The Post Office Historical Society and the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union both became interested in the place. In 1977, they began a restoration process together, and in April 1978 *Eyre Bird Observatory* and Museum was opened to the public.<sup>39</sup>

In 2001, the Institution of Engineers, Australia, Western Australian Division unveiled two commemorative plaques, one at Esperance (unveiled 28 November) and the other at Albany (unveiled 8 December), to honour the East-West Telegraph as a national engineering landmark.<sup>40</sup>

The telegraph and the steam engine were the two inventions which had the most profound effects on nineteenth century communications. Of the two, it was the telegraph... which had the greater impact on Australian society, business and government...

By any standards the construction of nearly 2,500 kilometres of telegraph line from Port Augusta to Albany along a coastline, most of which was virtually unknown, and which was subject to notoriously rough seas, was an epic undertaking.<sup>41</sup>

*Eyre Bird Observatory* operates a field station for research into the birds around the Great Australian Bight. The place is internationally recognised and has spotted about 260 different species of birds. Two members of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union occupy the place as wardens. The place is open to the public, offering simple live-in accommodation, with meals and outdoor activities including bird watching, bushwalking, beach combing, photography and painting. Bird studies, which include banding and a weekly count of shorebirds and seabirds, are conducted. Courses are offered, which vary from year to year, and have dealt with birds, mammals, reptiles, plants, photography, history, music, stargazing and art. The Museum, housed in one room, records the history of the building as a telegraph station. The place also houses a collection of books donated by American Harold Anderson, who felt that the Nullabor was a good place to sit out the nuclear holocaust he was expecting. He sent his books to Eyre but was mugged and died before he could join them.<sup>42</sup> The place also operates a starling trapping program

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36 *West Australian*, 8 October 1977, letter to the editor from R. Dimer.

37 The undated and unsigned sketch of the buildings referenced earlier indicates that the second building at the station was of stone.

38 There are DOLA correspondence file for the reserve. National archive files do not indicate a use during this period. In contrast, Balladonia has uses recorded for this period, suggesting that a any occupation would have been recorded.. The place is isolated and accesible only by 4-wheel drive.

39 Information provided by Eyre Bird Observatory and Museum.

40 Institution of Engineers, Australia, WA Division, *East-West Telegraph: National engineering landmark commemorative plaque unveiling ceremony*, 12 pages, [Perth], 2001.

41 Institution of Engineers, Australia, WA Division, op cit, p. 6.

42 Information provided by Eyre Bird Observatory and Museum; Brochure handouts on Eyre Bird Observatory.

that thus far has been successful in preventing these bird pests from infesting Western Australia.<sup>43</sup>

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is also an official weather station, reporting three times daily to the Bureau of Meteorology. Electricity for the place is generated by a prototype solar power plant installed in 1982 by the Solar Energy Research Institute of WA. Maintenance and repairs on the place are carried out regularly, often using volunteer labour and materials supplied by CALM, who are responsible for the nature reserve.<sup>44</sup> The chimneys of the 1877 station building and the 1888 kitchen are extant on their original site. The chimneys match the early sketch of the place so it is possible to see which chimney belonged to which building.<sup>45</sup>

In 2002, *Eyre Bird Observatory* continues in this function.

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is located on the south side of Eyre Highway at Eyre, approximately 16 kilometres east of Cocklebiddy Roadhouse, and 26 kilometres south down a dirt track, the last 12 kilometres of which are strictly four wheel drive vehicle access, including a steep escarpment track. *Eyre Bird Observatory* nestles amongst sand dunes only one kilometre from the Southern Ocean. The access entry track skirts around the north side entering from the west where there is a large steel clad shed and the solar powerhouse.

Many rusted steel telegraph posts remain in place along various sections of the access track into *Eyre Bird Observatory*. Remains of the original post and rail fence are still in place along the east side of the building, together with the remains of a timber prop clothesline, and other elements remain on the north and south sides. On the north side of the building is a concrete underground water tank covered with a flat roof of corrugated iron. Round, aboveground, concrete water tanks are in place on the northwest and northeast corners of the building. Also on the southeast corner is an original timber telegraph post associated with the telegraph lines into the telegraph office. Fifteen metres north of the northeast corner of the building is a detached asbestos toilet building. Approximately fifty metres to the northwest is the weather station. Approximately fifty metres to the southeast is the timber post and wire remains of a 'chook' pen. The surrounding terrain is the natural vegetation associated with the sand dunes, although this has been cleared in the immediate vicinity of the building.

Two hundred metres due east of *Eyre Bird Observatory*, by way of a path meandering through the sand hills for a considerably greater distance, is the ruins of the original telegraph station. This consists of two limestone chimneys, some distance apart and obviously associated with different buildings, a small gable roofed timber structure, and an original timber telegraph post.

*Eyre Bird Observatory* displays characteristics of Federation Bungalow style. Typical of the style, the place is a ground-hugging, single storey, verandahed building with simple massing and broad roof planes, constructed of natural materials. The elevations are well proportioned.

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43 Information from Ian Elliot, 25 October 2002

44 Information provided by Eyre Bird Observatory and Museum; Brochure handouts on Eyre Bird Observatory; *Eyre Bird Observatory Report 6: 1988-1992*, Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, 1996, pp. 4-5.

45 Physical evidence.

*Eyre Bird Observatory* comprises the 1897 telegraph station and residence building, underground water tank, remains of post and rail fence and clothes line, timber telegraph post, and the ruins located 200 metres to the east. The above ground concrete water tanks, detached WC, corrugated iron clad shed and Solar power station are of no heritage significance, although integral to the continued use of the place.

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is a single-storey face limestone construction with a corrugated iron roof. The hipped roof is clad with corrugated iron with timber vented gablets at each end of the ridge. Rendered square stone chimneys remain in place.

The face limestone is regular in shape and laid in random coursing with rendered quoined corners and openings. The stone is black line pointed on all elevations. There is also some evidence of fretting stone.

The footprint of *Eyre Bird Observatory* is a single rectangular pavilion with surrounding verandahs under the main roof. Sections of the verandah are included in the main structure including the bathroom on the northeast corner and the kitchen on the north wall. The east verandah and the north verandah at the west end have been semi-enclosed with lattice. The east verandah lattice enclosure forms rooms that are further divided by back-to-back wardrobes. The interior layout comprises a group of four rooms at the east end. The rooms are not interconnected; the two easternmost rooms open onto their respective verandahs, and the other two rooms, as well as opening onto verandahs, also access a central corridor that runs north to south through the building. The corridor also accesses the rooms at the western end of the building, opening into the dining room that in turn accesses the kitchen, telegraph office (wardens' bedroom) and battery room (office).

The verandahs are included under the main roof, at break pitch, and replacement 0.100 metre timber posts are in place. The verandah floor is replacement 0.075 metre tongue and groove jarrah boards, that are very weathered and in a dangerous condition on the southwest corner. The verandah ceiling is lined at the east end with painted matchboard, on the rake. There are other small areas of matchboard evident, but the remainder to the verandah ceiling is lined with hessian to prevent birds nesting.

Timber elements, windows and doors throughout the building are late 1970s installations. The windows and doors are inconsistent throughout, although all are timber framed. The floorboards vary from room to room. Architraves and skirtings are inconsistent. The walls are hard plaster. The ceilings seem to be the original lathe and plaster in most rooms, with central ceiling vents and evidence of moisture ingress. There is tongue and groove painted matchboard ceiling lining in the kitchen.

There are no original fitouts remaining in the place. The dining room mantelpiece, kitchen stove and bathroom fitout are all part of the late 1970s renovation.

The underground water tank is a concrete structure comprising two compartments with a 'doorway' opening between. The timber structure over the tank supports corrugated iron sheets laid to form the roof. The tank operates as the water supply for the place.

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is generally in fair condition. The regular maintenance from the wardens retains the condition of the place, but there are some works beyond the scope of simple maintenance and beyond the financial

resources of the owners. The timber verandah is weathered and in poor condition, particularly the south west corner.

Despite many years of vacancy and subsequent works to facilitate a function, the place shows minimal evidence of change. *Eyre Bird Observatory* has a moderate degree of integrity.

Except for the extensive removal and subsequent reinstallation of timber elements, doors, windows, floors and fitouts, the place is substantially intact and demonstrates a moderate degree of authenticity.

Other elements of significance, outside the curtilage, are: the monument to explorer Edward Eyre (500 metres south), Eyre's well (500 metres south), and the rusted steel telegraph poles along the access track.

### 13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

There are a number of telegraph stations remaining in the State. Most were designed by the PWD between 1885 and 1896, under Chief Architect George Temple Poole.

The other telegraph station buildings on the East-West line and constructed in 1896-1898, include *Israelite Bay Post & Telegraph Station (Ruin)* (HCWA Place 836); *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* (HCWA Place 03558); and *Bremer Bay Telegraph Station* (HCWA Place 1248), occupied as a private residence and in good condition but roofed with aluminium tiles. The *Esperance Telegraph Station* (HCWA Place 826) was demolished in the 1960s. On the new line constructed from Eucla to Norseman in 1896, the *Norseman Post and Telegraph Office* (HCWA Place 767) is still in use as a post office and residence, while *Balladonia Telegraph Station* (HCWA Place 761), is unoccupied with an unroofed section deteriorating into ruin.

Former telegraph stations on other lines include *Cossack Post and Telegraph Office* (HCWA Place 2347), a two storey building which has been restored and occupied as an art gallery, and *Hamelin Pool Post & Telegraph Station* (HCWA Place 11720), is not occupied as a museum.

*Bremer Bay Telegraph Station* and *Balladonia Telegraph Station* are entered on the Register of the National Estate, while *Israelite Bay Post & Telegraph Station (Ruin)* and *Cossack Post and Telegraph Office* are entered on both the State Register of Heritage Places and the Register of the National Estate.

*Eyre Bird Observatory* is one of the more intact and original examples of an 1890s telegraph station.

### 13.4 REFERENCES

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### 13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

A number of other elements of potential significance are located in the vicinity of *Eyre Bird Observatory*, namely the monument to explorer Edward Eyre (500 metres south), Eyre's well (500 metres south), and the rusted steel telegraph posts along the access track. These elements have not been included in this assessment, but may warrant further investigation should development be proposed for the area that may impact them.