AN ABORIGINAL SITE COMPLEX AT THE FOOT OF MOUNT ELIZA WHICH INCLUDES THE OLD SWAN BREWERY BUILDING

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Introduction
A distinctive feature of the modern city of Perth is the high ground to the west which overlooks the confluence of the Canning and Swan rivers. The hill, which slopes precipitously down to the tidal estuary on the north bank of the Swan, was mapped by James Stirling during his first exploration of the Swan river in 1827 (Chart of the Swan River from a survey by Capt. James Stirling R.N. 1827; see Hallam 1979:20). He named the hill Mount Eliza after the wife of Governor Darling of New South Wales (Geographic names section, Department of Land Administration).

This conspicuous landmark is now enshrined as the much valued public space and memorial area known as Kings Park.

For thousands of years prior to European names being attached to these features, they were known and named by the Aboriginal population. Indeed, Aboriginal people were living along the river banks at a time when the sea level was more than 120m lower than it is now, and when the Swan River wound its way through a narrow ravine at the base of Mount Eliza, running as fresh water until it spilled into the sea to the north of where Rottnest Island now stands. With the progressive rising of the sea level, the lower lying land became inundated, higher ground formed islands off the mainland, and the Swan River system developed into a drowned valley with estuarine rather than freshwater conditions (Churchill 1959; Shackleton and Opdyke 1973).

In terms of Aboriginal occupation, the Swan River and the high ridge of Mount Eliza were a known feature from time immemorial, but the narrow apron of deposited sediment that has formed a strip of dry land along the base or Mount Eliza, and where the Swan Brewery building now stands, is relatively recent; it is unlikely to have been there longer than about 6000 years. Aboriginal people lived through these dramatic landform changes over thousands of years, gradually adapting as conditions altered. However, the advent of European settlement along the river, which commenced a mere 160 years ago, posed a challenge to adaptation which far outweighed the drowning of the land by rising seas.

Prior to European settlement of the Swan River Colony, the Aboriginal people who occupied the land had a system of inherited ownership based on clans of family groups. Each group owned sites of importance within their estates, and every spring and gully, every quaintly distorted tree, every patch of red ochre or white pipeclay was his landmark, and every point, hill, valley, slope or flat from the river’s source to its mouth had its name’ (Bates 1938:xvii). Different names have been recorded for different parts of Mount Eliza. The names include Gargatup, Gargarup, Ga-ra-katta and Barradh (Bloor 1987:18-19).

The camping and resource area known as Goonininup (sometimes abbreviated to Gooninup) was bounded upstream by a lone gum tree near the river bank which was a well-known landmark in the early days and gave the name ‘One Tree Point’ to the prominence of land on which it grew. This was situated upstream of Kennedy Fountain. The downstream boundary of the Goonininup area is not known, but it certainly included the natural land on which the Swan Brewery now stands (Bates, unpublished notes in Battye Library).

Both the Mount as a whole and individual places on the southern side or at the foot of the Mount have been recorded as having mythological significance to the Aborigines (Berndt 1973:52; Green 1979:6). The physical characteristics of Mount Eliza and the associated river system are an important factor underlying this mythology.

In European terms, Mount Eliza is a lithified dune deposit of limestone or calcrite cliff formations. At the base of the cliff, freshwater springs emerge, the strongest and most permanent of which has been landscaped with extraneous rock and is now known as Kennedy Fountain. A popular spot for wedding photographs, it is situated about 300m east of the Swan Brewery building.

In Aboriginal terms, the high ridge called Gargatup and the river which runs along its base were created by an ancestral being known as Waugal. Waugal camped at this spot; the presence of limestone is a physical manifestation of where he defecated, and where he urinated, a permanent freshwater spring of permanent high quality water with curative powers was formed. Indeed, the Aboriginal name for the area, Goonininup, is thought to derive from the Aboriginal word for Faces, kwun (Douglas 1976:89), and means ‘the place where he defecated’ (K. Colbung, pers. comm 1989).

It is immediately obvious from the above that the salient landscape features characteristic of this area are described from totally different cultural viewpoints. As
Confucius commented, humans are the same - it is their culture that drives them apart.

In order, therefore, for non-Aboriginal people to properly appreciate the significance of the Aboriginal site on portion of which the Swan Brewery was built, it is important to gain an insight into the value system that imbued the site with significance, and to conceptualise the wider picture of which the site is a part.

**Aboriginal interpretation of the landscape**

The Swan River and associated landscape features are embodied in a complex mythology centred around an ancestral being known to the Nyungar Aboriginal people of the Southwest as Waugal. Waugal was conceptualised in serpent form, and it was, and still is, believed that the Waugal created the life-giving Swan River and associated tributaries during epic mythic journeys. Indeed, according to the Aboriginal belief system, ancestral beings were responsible for the creation of all physical and social existence. The period of creation goes back through all time, beyond the 40,000 years Aboriginal people are known to have inhabited the Swan Valley (Hallam 1981).

The Waugal of the Nyungarr people is akin to the Great Rainbow Serpent features in Aboriginal mythology throughout Australia (Maddock 1972:120-124; Noonuccal 1988, see frontispiece). The belief systems associated with the Rainbow Serpent have both creative and punitive aspects. The creative aspect is closely linked with water, rain, procreation and regeneration, while the punitive aspect exerts sanctions against those who break the law (Berndt 1988:276-292; Hallam 1979:81-84).

The great mythic journey of the Waugal started at the sources of the Swan River, and on its serpentine route to the sea, resting places or places where specific activities occurred, were imbued with particular significance. Waugal vested these sacred places with special potency or power, which may be either beneficial or harmful depending on how the power is used and whether or not the behaviour of people who approach the place is appropriate. These sacred places included certain hills and high places, valleys, watercourses and deep pools, as well as particular trees or stones to which significance is attached.

The entire length of the Swan River was studded with places of mythic significance, each with its particular name and associated story, and each with prescribed rules of behaviour. The rules could include avoidances such as not going near the place, not touching particular vegetation near the site, not drinking water until certain conditions had been fulfilled and not building huts or cooking certain foods in the vicinity. Other sanctions included making propitiatory offerings of certain foods or strewing rushes or leaves near the site. Stories associated with the sites emphasised the power of the sacred snake to punish those who transgressed the rules (Bates in White 1985:220, 221; Bates, Unpublished notes, Battye Library, Acc.1212A, Section V1: p.6, 36, 37).

The name Waugal apparently derives from the word Waug meaning soul, spirit, breath, while the word Waugalan means ill, very sick, or under the influence of Waugal (Moore, descriptive vocabulary 1884:75). Waugal was all-powerful in creating and maintaining both the natural and the cultural law and order, and a breach of the moral code was punished by death or wasting disease (Bates in White 1985:218).

Many of these Waugal sites vested with special significance were well established focal points where people stopped on their journeys from afar to trade in red ochre, where inter-group meetings and cultural exchanges took place, where disagreements were settled or alliances established, and where initiates were progressively taught the responsibilities of manhood. Young initiates, whose schooling lasted over several seasons, visited successive camps learning not only the physical geography and food resources of the area, but also the mythology associated with the creation of each place and the appropriate rituals to observe. As in all Aboriginal religion throughout Australia, this information was encoded in song form, and was taught in rote form to the initiates. The longer the instruction period, the more songs were learned and the greater amount of encoded information was archived in the mind for future use.

These well established teaching camps were sometimes also linked with rituals regularly performed for the increase of human, animal and plant species, rituals integral to the perpetuation of everything vital to the well-being of the community.

Many Waugal sites of particular significance to Aboriginal people were documented by Mrs Daisy Bates who worked with Nyungar people during the period 1904 to 1910. Others were recorded as a result of a special metropolitan study commissioned in 1985 (O’Connor, Bodney and Little 1985). The locality known as Goonininup where the Swan Brewery was built is such a site.

The earliest specific reference to an association between the Waugal and Mount Eliza was made by Francis Armstrong, the first Government interpreter, as early as 1836:

> There are certain large round stones, in different parts of the Colony, which they (the Aborigines) believe to be the eggs laid by the waugal [sic]. There was, lately, one such stone on the shore of Currie’s Bay, near Mount Eliza, which has since been removed, by some of the settlers probably. On passing such stones, they are in the habit of making a bed for it, of the rushes of the blackboy; but with what precise object, has never been ascertained. (Armstrong 1836 in Green 1979:189).
The next known reference is not until 1944, in a letter written by F.I. Bray (Commissioner of Native Affairs) to K. Gillies of the Karrakatta Club, in which he recounts information given to his predecessor, A.O. Neville, by an old Aboriginal:

It appears that in the dim distant past here was an earthquake and Waugal [sic], the mythical spirit snake, came to earth, the heaving of the ground being occasioned by his struggles to emerge therefrom. Waugal, unlike our serpent of the Garden of Eden, was the spirit which was responsible for correcting wrongdoers and Garrgatup [sic] was his final resting place, that is, his permanent resting place before he left to go by a devious route into the sea, from which he has never since emerged. (Bray 1944).

Bray was under the impression that Garrgatup was the flat at the foot of Mount Eliza just about opposite Mill Point, but earlier records give the alternative spellings Gargatup and Gargarup as being the general name for Mount Eliza (Lyon, Perth Gazette 1833; Lyon in Green 1979:173), while Daisy Bates records Karragatup as the general name for Eliza Bay (Bates, unpublished notes, Battye Library).

Makin (1970:73) records a tradition in which the abrupt rise of Mount Eliza from the bank of the Swan River was believed to be caused by the struggles of the mythical Waugal as it came to the surface and then wriggled its way to the sea, creating the present course of the Swan River.

In about 1976, when collecting data on Aboriginal Fringe-dwellers’ camps, Michael Robinson, former Registrar of Aboriginal Sites, was told of a mythical Waugal track that connected the spring at Success Hill by an underground route to King’s Park (M. Robinson, pers. comm. 1987). Another underground connection has been recorded between Lake Monger and the Kings Park area (O’Connor 1985: 31). The latter is described as a ‘tunnel’ created by Waugal, and was thought by Aboriginal informants to open into the Swan River somewhere between Quarry Point and the old Swan Brewery.

In 1979, Ken Colbung wrote a foreword for Neville Green’s publication, Nyungar - the people, in which he recalls his elderly uncles and aunts explaining how the giant rainbow snake of the Dreaming uncoiled itself and created the Swan and Canning Rivers. Waugal then disappeared into a freshwater spring now known as Kennedy Fountain that to this day can be seen along Mounts Bay Road at the foot of Kings Park (Green Comemorative Centre near the present Kennedy Fountain in 1980, the reasons given for the choice of site were as follows:

In the Dreaming, so local Aboriginals believed, Waugal, an immense winged snake, lived on the high ground where the State Parliament House now stands. Travelling underground, he emerged at Mt. Eliza at a place where there is a fresh water spring now known as Kennedy fountain, and crawling his way to the sea, created the Swan River.’ (Aboriginal Project in Kings Park: Members of the Committee, W.A. State branch of NAC, 1980).

In 1983, prior to the development of the equestrian centre at Brigadoon, a series of sites were recorded in the vicinity of Bells Rapids and Mount Mambup. These were described as being associated with a male initiation ritual involving a symbolic journey in which the initiate followed the Waugal cycle from Walyungara to Mount Eliza (site information files, Department of Aboriginal Sites).

Additional information on the journey of the Waugal was given by Ken Colbung in 1987, in which he described how the Waugal created the bends in the river at Belmont and Maylands as he coiled and eased his way down the river. Before he reached the islands at the Causeway, he rattled his skin, shaking all the scales off in the mud as he wrestled to gain access to Perth Water. When he finally emerged through the Narrows, he made another big coil to create the open expanse of water downstream of the Narrows. Waugal then ascended Mount Eliza through a gap in the limestone cliffs by way of the small valley or stormwater gully situated behind where the Swan Brewery stables were built (K. Colbung in Bloor 1987:5; Colbung and Bloor, July 1987). This valley, the upper end of which is now occupied by the chain of ornamental lakes below the Pioneer Women’s Fountain in Kings Park, became a Dreaming Track for Waugal.

A special ritual associated with a harbinger in the form of a crow has to be performed before approaching the Waugal dreaming track. Crows are regarded as ‘keepers of the country’ and symbolically represent the coastal Nyungar as opposed to the inland Nyungar whose symbol is the White Cockatoo.

In the words of Ken Colbung:

...(The White Cockatoos have) got their sites up towards the top end of the Swan and the Crows have got all theirs down this end, and that’s why you’ve got to ask the crows’ (birds) permission to come. They’ve got to hear you and if they hear you, then you’re right! If you couldn’t find them here, you couldn’t do anything. (K. Colbung in Bloor 1987:6,9).

Ken Colbung described the Swan Brewery (specifically the old Stables), as being on top of the Dreaming track.

They built that Brewery on top of the Dreaming track. It’s on where the Waugal comes in... The Brewery’s right in the way where the snake used to come up through... (K. Colbung in Bloor 1987:5).
At the lowermost of the small chain of artificial lakes below the Pioneer Women’s Fountain, there used to be a significant area where there was natural water associated with other aspects of the myth:

You couldn’t go near it or you would be sucked in; the rainbow snake would get you. That was the snake’s hole, where he went in. (K. Colbung in Bloor 1987:5, Tilbrook 1985 b:8).

The Waugal area was associated with a circle of trees regarded as sacred by the Nyungarr (K. Colbung in Bloor 1987:5).

The water source on Mount Eliza was first recorded as a significant mythological site in 1985 (O’Connor et al 1985; Tilbrook 1985b). Under the heading ‘Kings Park Waugal Site’, the spring is described as being located approximately 120 metres to the south east of the Pioneer Women’s memorial (O’Connor et al 1985:80). An accompanying photograph (Plate 45) pictures the two lowermost ornamental pools. The report claims that the Pioneer women’s Memorial Fountain is partly supplied with water from this natural spring, but this is denied by the Kings Park authorities. However, although there is no longer evidence of this spring on the slopes above the Brewery site, the composition of the soil profiles is such that a perched water table associated with a spring could have been sustained there in the past (pers Comm. Soil and Rock Engineering Pty. Ltd.).

Additional details given by Ken Colbung describe how, after creating the water source on the slopes of Mount Eliza, Waugal then went underground and emerged at the base of the Mount to create the spring now known as Kennedy Fountain. This is a permanent water source believed to be associated with Waugal urine and is regarded as sacred with strong medicinal qualities (Ken Colbung, pers. comm.; preface in Green 1979:6).

Pre-colonial Aboriginal usage of the southern side of Mount Eliza
Immediately prior to European colonisation of the Swan River estuary, the terrain on which Perth was built belonged to an Aboriginal clan headed by an elder named Yellagona (variously spelt Yallagonga, Yellowgonga, Yalgunga etc).

Although Yellagona moved about his estate camping at different places according to the seasonal availability of food resources, his principal camps were near Mount Eliza. These are recorded as having been at Byerbup centred around the emu Brewery and associated spring (Lyon in Green 1979:173; Green 1984:49), and at Gooninup (Goonininup) near the Swan Brewery (Public plan of Perth ID/40 no.2; Bates, unpublished notes). Both sites were certainly used by Yellagona for different food-gathering strategies, but there is also evidence that Goonininup, like many other sites created by Waugal, had important ceremonial associations.

In the Swan River somewhere along the foot of Mount Eliza, there was a deep pool known as a Waugal hole. This was a dangerous place which had to be avoided (Bates in White 1985:220). Although it is no longer known exactly where this deep Waugal hole is located, two areas of deep water (in excess of 6 metres) are shown both upstream and downstream of the Brewery location (Swan and Canning Rivers Boating Guide, PWD, WA 49965, 1984; Swan River depth chart, Public Works Department, 48129-12.23). The deepest part of the downstream trough is about 300 metres from the Swan Brewery, while the upstream pool is about 500 metres distant and is situated adjacent to a shallow sand bank which projects from the eastern side of Mill Point. The possible connection between these deep water holes and the Waugal hole is, however, tenuous, and may be misleading. There would have been many changes in water flow and associated deposition in the Swan River over the past 160 years.

During the early days of Perth settlement, an anchor was lost in the deep Waugal hole. None of the local Aboriginal people could be induced to dive for the anchor despite offers of reward, and when an unsuspecting Aboriginal stranger to the country was pressed into service, he dived but never came up again. It was firmly believed that the Waugal had caught and eaten him (Bates in White 1985:220).

On the shore of Currie’s Bay (now Matilda Bay) near Mount Eliza, there was also a rounded stone believed to be a Waugal egg, around which vegetation was strewn by those who passed (Armstrong 1833 in Green 1979:189; O’Connor et al 1985:31,80). The precise location of this stone is no longer known although one report suggests it was somewhere between Quarry Point and the Swan Brewery (O’Connor 1985:31), and nor is it known for certain whether there was a geographical association between the Waugal hole and the Waugal egg. From the records left by Daisy Bates, however, there is a strong inference that there would have been an association.

No Aboriginal visitors who were strangers to a tract of country would go near powerful Waugal places without the proper introductions, and the ‘home’ people or residents of the country always scattered rushes or leaves from the Blackboy (Xanthorrhoea species) at a particular spot on their journey past a Waugal pool.

Bates records that at some of these Waugal places it was customary for Aboriginal people to make known their approach by calling out:

Ngain-ya ye-ya kooling. (I am coming now).
Nyal winjala nyynde? (Where are you?).

As they spread beds or rushes or Grass Tree leaves near the particular tree, rock or other focal point of the ritual, the Swan River Aborigines uttered the following formula:
Ngaija noono daranya gongin kalaguttuk nganya mamma. (Your bed carry countryman me father).

When asked why they did this, the answer was always that it was the Law and had been done for all time (Bates in White 1985:221).

The rounded stone representing a Waugal egg on the river bank at the foot of Mount Eliza would therefore have been the focus of propitiatory ties in all probability associated with the Waugal hole in the river. The symbolism of the egg suggests the site may also have been the focus of an increase or fertility site which Yellagonga’s group would have been responsible for looking after and for activating. Armstrong records that the stone had been removed from the shoreline at the foot of Mount Eliza, probably by settlers (Armstrong in Green 1979:189). It is the first recorded intentional desecration of an Aboriginal site in the annals of the Swan River Colony.

It is of particular note that two of Daisy Bates’ informants, Fanny Balbuk and Baaburgurt, took their names from the Goonininup site and therefore had a special spiritual tie with the place (Tilbrook 1985 b:5; Bates unpublished notes). Aboriginal personal names often derive from phrases in dreaming songs which enshrine the mythology related to places of importance (Meggitt 1962:279).

In addition to the specific connections with Waugal, the site of Goonininup had other important ritual and ceremonial associations. These are alluded to in two unpublished lists of place names compiled by Daisy Bates (Batty Library, Box 1212A, Section 11, notebook 16, p.6-7).

The first is a sequence of recognised camping places on the trade route followed by Aboriginal people from Busselton and beyond when they travelled to Perth to trade for the high grade red ochre located where the Perth Railway Station now stands (Bates, unpublished notes). Goonininup was one of the prescribed halting places on the trade route.

Red ochre or wilgi from the bog iron deposits beneath the Perth railway station was one of Yellagonga’s main assets, and it was traded far and wide to the north, south and east. As with all articles of trade, the further the goods travelled from their source, the greater their value became both in economic terms and in the degree of potency with which they became invested (Meggitt 1962:56). Bates documented that Aboriginal people from as far afield as Boundary Dam on the borders of Western Australia with South Australia knew and spoke of the red ochre wilgi from the Perth area.

An old Aboriginal from Ayer’s Rock or Uluru who was still living in 1913, had seen a lump of wilgi which came from the Perth area, at ‘the Land of boys’, this being the term used by the circumcised tribes to the cast in describing the uncircumcised Nyungar to the west (Bates, unpublished notes, 2573/24).

The second unpublished source is a long list of place names on an initiate’s track which extended eastwards beyond the red ochre route to link Busselton with the Porongorups and beyond (Bates, unpublished notes (see also Hammond 1980:19). On this route were the prescribed teaching camps which young male initiates had to attend during their long apprenticeship before being admitted into full adulthood with the right to marry. Goonininup is among the teaching camps listed for the initiates. Indeed, the association between initiation ceremonies and the Kings Park area is corroborated by current Nyungar tradition (Bloor 1987:1). A boy was taken from his natural parents at the age of nine or ten, and then spent the next few years travelling about the country of his kin, staying at prescribed camps under the tutelage of elders of the opposite moiety to his own. During his apprentice years, the boy was known as moolyect, and by the time he returned home after puberty, his nasal septum would have been pierced so that it accommodated a bone fibula which projected on either side of his nose (Figure 3). The boy’s return to his parents’ group was celebrated by a series of ceremonies in which men and women participated together. The gathering was the occasion for the ritualised exchange of gifts between his own people and those who had been his guardians and tutors during sojourns in the prescribed camps of learning (White 1985:150-151).

The informant who provided the data for the sequence of camps listed by Daisy Bates was an old blind man, Baaburgurt, who ‘would sit all day long, the tears streaming from his sightless eyes, singing songs of his lost country’ (Bates 1938:69). The amazing feat of memory, listing in sequence some 120 place names, was doubtless reinforced by having learned the songs for all the camps he had himself visited as an initiate. The high degree of correlation between the camps of the red ochre trade route and that followed by the initiates, suggests a well established pattern which, as in other areas of Australia, was believed to have been laid down by ancestral beings in mythical times (Berndt 1988:241-258). The account of the Waugal creative journey given by Ken Colbung in 1987 mentions that Waugal travelled to the porongorups and back (Bloor 1987:4), exactly the route given by old Baaburgurt for the initiates journey (Bates, unpublished notes).

The functional layout of these prescribed meeting places was, and still is, divided into public or secular space, and private or ritual space (Berndt 1988:295, 298; Meggitt 1962:282-288); even though no boundaries are formally marked, everyone within the cultural group knows which places are set aside for specific functions, and treats them accordingly. The physical characteristics of the camp at Goonininup were naturally adapted to fulfil these separate functions, with the public area centred around Kennedy Fountain and...
the private area located in the secluded gully on the slopes of Mount Eliza (K. Colbung, pers. comm. 1989). Symbolically, the private area was associated with the place where the Waugal went into the earth (procreation), whereas the public area was the spring where Waugal emerged from the earth (birth).

When the final ceremony took place which admitted the initiates into positions of social responsibility and welcomed them back to their home group, a great ceremonial feast was held. This was timed to coincide with a seasonal kangaroo hunt. In the Perth region, the hunt is recorded as having taken place on Mount Eliza (Bates in White 1985:244). The animals were encircled by fire and then driven through a predetermined opening over an almost perpendicular descent. Terrified by shrieks, yell, smoke and flame, the kangaroos rushed headlong into a hollow which was a veritable cul-de-sac, and here they were easily despatched by hunters armed with heavy spears. The name of the kangaroo hunt was yonggar-a-kabin, and informants remembered that each man's spear that gave the killing blow was known. The owner of the spear became the owner of the kangaroo, the meat of which the hunter then distributed among his ‘in-laws’ (Bates in White 1985:244). The communal hunt was accompanied by mush feasting and ritual fighting, and also the making of kangaroo skin cloaks and kangaroo fur string which was used for belts and hairbands (Bates 1924).

The precise location of the hollow where the kangaroos were killed was said by Daisy Bates to be where a banana garden was later planted. This is probably the market garden area where contemporary photographic records who a stand of plantains, in the present vicinity of Jacob’s Ladder. However, in one of Daisy Bates’ many typewritten drafts both for her book and for newspaper articles, she appears to couple the killing spot with the name goonininup, although her description of the named terrains is confusing (Bates 1938:63; Bates 1924). Lyon wryly comments that the headquarters of Yellagonga had now become the headquarters of the territories of the British King in Western Australia, and on that very spot the Aboriginal ‘King’ now held out his hand to beg a crust of bread (Lyon 1833 in Green 1978:173). These words were written in 1833. The transition from ‘king’ to ‘beggar’ had taken four short years to complete. Lyon concludes with the wry comment, “Why do you smile?”

European exploration of the Swan River (so named after the many swans observed on the water) had in fact, preceded the first settlement by Europeans by 132 years. During successive visits by the Dutch in 1601, the French in 1801 and then the British in 1827, mention is made in the journals of recent signs of Aboriginal occupation (footprints, fires, deserted huts), but the people themselves kept, for the most part, well hidden (Hallam 1987).

Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact localities of the Aboriginal campsites encountered, Hallam (1987:21) has suggested that the Dutch, who thought they had seen a crowd of men at what was probably the foot of Mount Eliza, found only a pit with fresh water in which a scented herb was soaking, and evidence of many footsteps. Just over a hundred years later, also at what may have been near the foot of Mount Eliza, the French reported seeing two native spears at two huts in which there was freshly burned wood (Hallam 1987:22).

Following Stirling’s exploratory voyages up the Swan River in 1827, settlers began to arrive in 1829, and after receiving their allotments, commenced erecting temporary buildings. Practically the whole of the water frontage along the Swan intertidal zone was divided into blocks, title of which was given to the new settlers. For a few years, the Aboriginal people continued, as far as possible, to pursue their normal subsistence activities and to frequent their usual camping places although they were surrounded by aliens (Tilbrook 1987:138-186).

Amidst the first areas to be affected by the activities of the colonist was Mount Eliza, situated as it was adjacent to the centre of the new town.

The block of land along the southern foot of Mount Eliza (Swan Brewery area) was gazetted as Perth Town Lot 75 (later subdivided to include Perth Sub-lot b), and soon after the arrival of the colonists in 1829, a small shipyard was established there under James Smith. The boat building project was abandoned, however, when ill health forced Smith to return to England (Bodycoat, Hocking Staples 1985).
Within only a few years of settlement, the traditional Aboriginal campsites, water sources and food resources had become encroached upon to the extent that their hunter-gatherer life-style was no longer economically viable. Violent clashes resulting in deaths became a matter of concern both to the colonists and the Aboriginal people, the latter having suffered a total of 16 dead and approximately 30 severely wounded with gunshot. In July 1833, a deputation of two Aboriginal men sought an interview with the Lieutenant Governor (Perth Gazette, September 7, 1833). They wanted no more violence, and the tenor of their plea was for a place where they could camp, forage and dance in peace (one of their dances held in Perth had been interrupted by a colonist throwing a bucket of water over them).

Mount Eliza Native Institution

One month after the Aborigines interviewed the Lieutenant Governor, the authorities decided to establish a Government feeding depot on the block of land on which the Swan Brewery now stands. It is difficult to ascertain whether this was out of consideration of the plight of the Aboriginal people, or whether it was an attempt to curb the food thefts about which the colonists repeatedly complained.

The official notice in the Perth Gazette of October 5, 1833, announcing the establishment of the feeding station which became known as the Mount Eliza Depot, is worth quoting in full:

It being considered expedient by the local Government to appropriate that part of the reserves, situate immediately under Mount Eliza, and lately used as a ship yard, to the service of the Native tribes, several families of whom are now establishing themselves on the spot, under the charge of Captain Ellis, the Superintendent:

NOTICE is hereby given, that during the time it may be necessary to occupy such ground for the purpose contemplated, a public thoroughfare through this reserve will not be permitted, as the efforts now being made to cultivate a friendly intercourse with the Natives, may otherwise be frustrated.

There was considerable public resistance to the blocking of access along the foreshore through the reserve, and the prohibition soon lapse. Instead, regret was expressed by the colonists that the Aborigines had not been kept off the streets of Perth (de Burgh 1981:121). There were objections that the Aborigines wandered about naked, armed with barbed spears, their dogs were a nuisance, and their singing and wailing for the dead created an objectionable noise (Green 1984:107-116, 140).

From the Institution, rations of wheat were issued twice daily to the Aboriginal people, who camped nearby in their bark huts or humptes. The number of people receiving rations between November 1833 and May 1834 averaged 47 each day, rising as high as 119, or dropping to nil in keeping with seasonal subsistence activities and social commitments. Traditional activities included fishing and crabbing throughout the period, firing Mount Eliza in December, gathering nectar from banksia flowers in January, collecting the burying zami nuts in order to detoxify them, and wallaby hunting in February in the limestone cliffs (Tilbrook 1985 b:1.8; Bates 1924).

Corroborees were held in the vicinity of the ration depot especially when there were visits from tribes who lived to the south at Murray River and beyond, and to the north at Moore River, York and New Norcia. These visits are well documented in the archives and one such performance, in which a woman danced, was described as having spectators seated in a semi-circle with a number of small fires in front, resembling stage lights in a theatre (Weekly reports from Captain Ellis, CSO Vol 29: 157-159; Tilbrook 1985b:6). Visits from tribes from distant areas were often associated with ceremonial activities and ritual trade and exchange, which formalised reciprocity and ensured a wide network of friendly contact.

In 1834, Captain Ellis, who had been in charge of the feeding depot since its inception, died as a result of a spear wound to the head during the battle of Pinjarra. He was succeeded by Francis Armstrong, a young man who had mastered the Nyungar language and who became the Government Interpreter. The objectives of the Native Institution were now redefined, with an emphasis placed on an exchange of services rather than handouts. An effort was made to develop useful skills among the Aboriginal people so that they would make better labourers to assist the colonists (Green 1984:142). The Aborigines were provided with a boat to encourage the provision of fish for the colonists, acacia gum was traded for flour, and the Aboriginal people were encouraged to establish vegetable gardens in the vicinity of the Native Institution. This is possibly the area that became known as 'Lukin's Garden', where the stables were later built (Interpreter's Report 1936, CSO Inward Correspondence 29/158; de Burgh 1981:123).

Although there has been some confusion regarding the precise locality of the Native Institution in the past (Tilbrook 1985 b:3; Green 1984:1; 16; de Burgh 1981:121; Bodycoat, Hocking and Staples 1985; Green 1981:89; Vinnicombe 1989:24), the painstaking research of Mr William de Burgh has clarified beyond doubt that the Native Institution was definitely on the site where the old Swan Brewery now stands. The first buildings, erected in 1831 were for a small shipyard, and these buildings included a residential house. By mid 1832, the shipbuilding project was abandoned, and a year later, 1833, the premises were taken over for the Native Institution. When this was relinquished in 1938, the 'buildings and premises comprising the late Native Institution; were transferred by licence to Schoales and Nash to establish a steam driven flour mill on the
premises (notes compiled by W. de Burgh from correspondence files in the Battye Library).

With his understanding of the Nyungar language, Francis Armstrong became friendly with a number of Aboriginal people, and clearly understood more about them than most people at the time. Unfortunately, however, a considerable proportion of his time was spent recording long strings of petty complaints about the Aborigines by the settlers. One of Armstrong’s tasks was to prepare a census of Aboriginal people, and to this end, he recorded, over the period December 1836 to October 1837, a total of approximately 169 individual names of Aboriginal men and women who came to the Native Institution to collect rations of wheat. He also recorded the frequency of their visits over the year. Interestingly, Yellagonga, whose traditional camp had been at this site, returned every month bar one (S. Hallam, lists compiled from archival material in the Battye Library).

In January 1838, Armstrong noted that he ‘gave the natives some stuff to cover themselves with’. At the same time, there was authorisation for the Constable to remove undressed Aborigines from town, ‘letting them understand that they cannot come in unless covered, even if only with bark.’

This new ruling apparently contributed to the death knoll for the Native Institution, for it was soon closed down.

As a result of increasing strictures on their movements, the Aboriginal people found it impossible to sustain their traditional lifestyle in the settled areas.

In time, legislation was introduced which forbade Aboriginal people to enter the city of Perth without special written permission. Indeed, this legislation was not repealed until as recently as 1954 (Howard 1981:82; Green 1984:141). It has not been legally possible, therefore, for Aboriginal people to maintain easy access to their sites within the metropolitan area for over 100 years.

Renewed Aboriginal involvement
Motivated by the general granting of citizenship rights to Aborigines which was instituted as recently as 1967, Aboriginal people began to form organisations through which they could express some of their long repressed aspirations. Associations such as the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship and the Aboriginal Advancement Council were formed and a real desire to be heard was expressed in 1971 when the ‘Tent Embassy’ was set up on the lawn of Parliament House in Perth following similar action by Aborigines in Canberra. With the change of Commonwealth Government the following year, a policy of self-determination for the Aboriginal people was slowly introduced (Howard 1981:81-84, 101).

In 1983, the Western Australian Government appointed a commissioner to conduct an inquiry into Aboriginal land interests. This heralded a new era in relations between Government and the Aboriginal people. For the first time, the indigenous population was being asked what it thought, how it felt and what were its aspirations concerning land and site related issues.

Concurrent with this shift in emphasis from paternalism to self-determination, considerably more consultation has taken place with Aboriginal communities regarding their cultural heritage. The implementation of the Aboriginal Heritage Act has become the concern not only of a Government Instrumentality, but also of the Aboriginal people themselves.

The Swan Brewery building which was constructed on the Goonininup site over a hundred years ago, has become the focus of a new-found confidence to express Aboriginal frustrations and Aboriginal aspirations. It has become the centre of a controversy which has moved beyond that of a struggle to preserve a site of significance, to that of a struggle for political equity and justice.

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In conclusion, this report fully recognises the major part played by Aboriginal people who, since the time of settlement one hundred and sixty years ago, have generously shared their knowledge and experience, even in the face of derision and disdain.
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