



## 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\*

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is valued for its use of local limestone, creating significant cultural element on the remote Eucla coast, which is in picturesque harmony with its sand dune landscape, the movements of which covers and uncovers various parts of the structure. (Criterion 1.1 & 1.4)

#### 11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is an important remnant of the largest station on the 1877 East-West Telegraph line linking Western Australia with the eastern states and overseas, and acted as the transfer point of telegraphic messages between South Australia and Western Australia from 1898 to 1907, when the operations were amalgamated under the WA Post and Telegraph Department. (Criteria 2.1 & 2.2)

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is a remnant of the 1898 telegraph station complex constructed at Eucla 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 timber telegraph station (c.1877). (Criterion 2.2)

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* 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 Resident Magistrate, Customs Officer, Meteorological Observer and Landing Waiter. (Criterion 2.2)

\* 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.

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is associated with expirée James Fleming who was involved in construction of the first private telegraph lines in the State in 1869-1872 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)

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* was designed as a simple interpretation of Federation Free style by the PWD under Chief Architect George Temple Poole, who was responsible for many fine public buildings in the State during a period of growth from 1885 to 1896. (Criterion 2.3)

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is associated with the telegraph men and their families, who worked and lived on the line between 1898 and 1927, and is indicative of the isolation and inhospitable conditions they endured. (Criterion 2.3)

### **11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

### **11.4 SOCIAL VALUE**

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is the last remaining element of the once thriving community that existed at Eucla, and which was based around the operation of the telegraph station. (Criterion 4.1)

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is valued by the general community and by travellers and tourists along the Eyre Highway 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 *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* was a vital 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**

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is rare as a relatively substantial telegraph station as it had to house the staff of both the Western Australian and South Australian offices.

### **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is a representative ruin example of a regional overland telegraph residence established in remote coastal locations in 1898. (Criterion 6.1)

### **12.3 CONDITION**

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is in fair condition. The walls are stable, although the chimneys have some loose stones that are dangerous. The surrounding sand dunes variously cover and uncover the structure.

### **12.4 INTEGRITY**

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* has a high degree of integrity as a ruin.

### **12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

The remaining fabric provides considerable evidence of the original fabric of *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* and demonstrates a high degree of authenticity as a ruin.

### 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

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* comprises the ruin of the limestone residence of the West Australian Telegraph Master, constructed in 1898, and small remnants of two other buildings of the Eucla telegraph station complex, most likely the South Australian Telegraph Master's residence and the Billiard Room (1923). The place was designed by the Public Works Department under Chief Architect George Temple Poole, and built by Justice Baron Locke. The Eucla telegraph station opened in 1877, as the main station on the East-West Telegraph line. The Old Eucla Telegraph Station, a timber construction, was built c. 1878. New stone buildings, comprising the Telegraph Station Office and residences for the West Australian and South Australian Telegraph Masters were constructed in 1898 to house staff and operations during the gold boom period. The Old Eucla Telegraph Station was occupied as single-men's quarters. After the place was abandoned by the Government in 1927, the buildings were occupied as residence and wayside house by the Gurney family (1949-1959), who then used much of the material in the construction of the Eucla Pass Motel (1962) and Moopina homestead (1968).

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 sender would submit a written telegram to a post office, where it was sent translated into Morse code to the destination. The telegrams received would usually then be hand delivered to the addressee. The words were abbreviated to reduce the expense associated with sending the messages. 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

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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.](#)

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>

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.<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. A townsite reserve was proclaimed for Eucla in 1873 but a townsite was not surveyed at the time.<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 were 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>

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<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, 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; [West Australian Government Gazette, p. 182, 1873.](#)

<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.

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 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> 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>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> Three weeks earlier, on 20 November 1877, 19 year-old telegraph operator William George Bailey died at Eucla, from what is believed to have been appendicitis. He was buried a short distance from the station.<sup>12</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>13</sup> Cooking and washing was apparently done outside in bush shelters. The Eucla Telegraph Station

<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> Institution of Engineers, Australia, WA Division, op cit; [Plan of Esperance Bay-Eucla telegraph line, Sheet 7, GWS WSD 1383, SROWA](#).

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

<sup>12</sup> *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 1; *APO Magazine*, Feb-March 1962, p. 13, National Archives file, K1209, Folder 7, Eucla.

<sup>13</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit; *West Australian Government Gazette*, 1875-1888.



(c.1877) was twice the size of the buildings at the other stations as it had to house the staff of both the Western Australian and South Australian offices, and a separate tender was called for its construction.<sup>14</sup>

The building at Eucla was quite an imposing structure with a central porch and operating room dividing it into separate quarters of four rooms and a kitchen each for the South and West Australian staffs: the whole being surmounted by a 30-foot flagpole.<sup>15</sup>

In 1882, large Reserves for public purposes were gazetted around the telegraph stations on the route. Reserve 523A at Eucla was 150 acres in size. On 12 November 1885, the townsite of Eucla was designated and the boundaries defined. The c.1877 Eucla Telegraph Station was situated on Eucla Lot 74.<sup>16</sup>

The South Australian staff handled the messages on their side of the wire and the West Australian staff did the same for the messages on the west side. In the 1870s and 1880s, the two operators, one for each State, sat side by side at a table under the windows. In the 1890s, when telegraphic traffic had increased considerably, the operators sat around a long table.<sup>17</sup> The two states had different methods of handling telegraph traffic, including using variations of the Morse alphabet, with WA using the Universal code and SA the Victorian alphabet, and while WA numbered its messages in batches of five, SA numbered them consecutively. The hardware, including poles, insulators and batteries, was also different between the two states.<sup>18</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>19</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 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

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<sup>14</sup> *West Australian Government Gazette*, 23 November 1876, p. 259, tenders called but no acceptance found; Photograph of Old Eucla Telegraph Station, 1890s, National Archives File K1209, Folder 4, Eucla Post Office.

<sup>15</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> *West Australian Government Gazette*, 1882, pp. 43-44; 12 November 1885, [pp. 566 & 598](#); [PWD Plan 6361, 1898, SROWA, PWD plans on microfiche](#).

<sup>17</sup> 'Eucla, Ancient and Modern', *Transmitter*, 16 March 1898, 4 page typescript copy, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 2, Eucla Post Office; Memories of Jim Hancock, telegraphist at Eucla for 3\_ years in the 1890s, *Post Office Magazine*, December 1966-January 1967, pp. 10-11, National Archives of Australia File, K30, 1967/24, Coolgardie-Eucla Telegraph line; photograph, Eucla operating room, Christmas 1889, Batty 000647D; photograph Eucla operators room c.1900, Batty 000720D.

<sup>18</sup> [Lawrence J., \*Perth-Adelaide Telegraph Link: 1877\*, J. Lawrence, 1945, typescript. Lawrence was an operator at Eucla in 1897.](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Blue Books, 1886, 1892; \*Yearbook of Western Australia\*, 1910, p. 80.](#)

be kept. Linemen were provided with camels and bicycles for travelling.<sup>20</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>21</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. In 1881, 17,188 messages were handled at Eucla, increasing to 24,586 in 1882. 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. In the mid 1890s, many of the operators at Eucla were living in tents, and the roof space of the station building was used for accommodation.<sup>22</sup> George Stevens, West Australian Telegraph Master at Eucla from 1886 to 1895, constructed a simple stone building as accommodation for some of his operators, referred to as Jubilee Villa, and for which he charged five shillings a week rent. George Stevens had married Annie Graham, daughter of Eyre Telegraph Master William Graham, in 1884, and occupied the WA section of the station with his wife and six children, five of whom had been born at Eucla. The SA Telegraph Master was not married, and shared his accommodation with his operators.<sup>23</sup> The only other woman known to have lived at Eucla in the early 1890s was Margaret Beere, wife of pastoralist and Eucla storekeeper Frederick William Beere. At least two of their children were born at Eucla.<sup>24</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

<sup>20</sup> '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, Battye 000813D.

<sup>21</sup> *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.

<sup>22</sup> 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; photograph of SA-WA Telegraph Master Michael Ryan in roof-space tent-structure, c. 1896, National Archives file K1209, Folder 4.

<sup>23</sup> Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph....', op cit; Lawrence J., op cit; Jeffery, Chris, *Eucla: Paper for the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, 23 February 1979, typescript. 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; photograph of SA Telegraph Master Michael Ryan, National Archives file K1209, Folder 4.

<sup>24</sup> Erickson, Rica, *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Perth, UWA Press, 1988, p. 184.

(quadruplex system), so that the existing coastal line and the new inland line were able to handle the greater load of telegraphic traffic.<sup>25</sup>

A plan for new telegraph station buildings was prepared by the PWD in 1896, under Chief Architect George Temple Poole. The plans were varied to suit the conditions and working requirements of each station. The Eucla telegraph station comprised a group of buildings, which included the Telegraph Station Office, a residence of seven rooms for the Telegraph Master of each State, and separate quarters for the operators and linemen. A contract for construction of the place was awarded to J. B. Locke, with a price of £6,334. His tender was accepted on 18 March 1897, and the Eucla station complex was completed in 1898.<sup>26</sup> The Old Eucla Telegraph Station was retained as single-men's quarters. J. B. Locke also carried out renewals and repairs on the Eucla Jetty, at this time, at a cost of £1,374.<sup>27</sup> He was also involved in the construction of the telegraph station at Israelite Bay.<sup>28</sup> Included in the telegraph station complex were four underground water tanks.<sup>29</sup> Their location in relation to the buildings is not known, as they do not appear on any of the plans located.

The 1898 telegraph station buildings were situated on Eucla Town Lots 75-77 and 98, while the Old Eucla Telegraph Station was on Lot 74.<sup>30</sup> The new accommodation meant that more families were able to live at Eucla. In December 1898, the *Eucla Recorder*, a small newspaper produced by the telegraph staff from October 1898 to September 1900, reported that the population of the town was forty-seven, comprising 34 men, 4 women and 9 children.<sup>31</sup> As well as the telegraph station buildings, in 1898 there was a large general store in Lempriere Street run by the Beeres, and a new four-room house being built by J. D. Batt of 'Moopena stone' in Porchester Street.<sup>32</sup>

With the addition of a handful of itinerant kangaroo shooters, and the occasional traveller and visiting pastoralist, the population of Eucla is estimated to have reached seventy at its peak. The *Eucla Recorder* reports an active community, which held debates, concerts and sporting events in cricket, tennis, athletics and billiards, and conducted a lending library housed in the former operating room of the old telegraph station building. Other activities included fishing and shooting, and weekend picnics to distant beauty spots, which almost the entire population attended, travelling on horseback or bicycle, or in buggies and carts pulled by camels or horses.<sup>33</sup> Tongue-in-

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<sup>25</sup> Notes by G. Compton Spencer, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 15, Eucla Post Office.

<sup>26</sup> PWD Plan 22387, 3 sheets, 1901-1923 'Eucla Post Office additions: New Billiard Room & Bathrooms', Station Office floor plan, SA Telegraph Master's house floor plan & site plan; PWD Plan 6361, 1898, Old Eucla Telegraph Station floor plan; *West Australian Government Gazette*, 7 May 1897, p. 859.

<sup>27</sup> PWD Plan 6361, 1898; *West Australian Government Gazette*, 6 August 1897, p. 1590.

<sup>28</sup> HCWA assessment documentation, Israelite Bay Telegraph Station, Place 0836.

<sup>29</sup> [Lawrence J., op cit.](#)

<sup>30</sup> Certificate of Title Vol. 1088 Fol. 545; plan of Eucla townsite, PWD Plan 6361, 1898 & site plan of Eucla Telegraph Station, 1905 & 1923, National Archives File K1209, Folder 19, Eucla Post Office.

<sup>31</sup> [Eucla Recorder, 31 December 1898, p. 4.](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Eucla Recorder, 4 February 1899, p. 4.](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Eucla Recorder, 15 October 1898 - 15 September 1900](#); Memories of Jim Hancock, op cit; Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph...', op cit; Photograph of Eucla township, c. 1900, National Archives File K1209, Folder 24, Eucla.



cheek advertisements in the *Eucla Recorder* offered the services of The Count's hairdressing saloon, open for two hours on a Sunday, a photographer who worked the same hours, Blake Holmes & Co poultry fanciers, and Messrs Willington & Clayer naturalists, who offered old clothes in exchange for spiders. Other advertisements included the Eucla Printing Works, which produced the *Recorder* and undertook the printing of circulars, programmes and visiting cards and bookbinding, and Eucla Livery Stables, which hired out horses and camels. The owners of the livery stables were Lemesurier (sic) and Cook.<sup>34</sup> In 1903, a P. Lemesurer (sic) leased the Eucla jetty and tramway for twelve months.<sup>35</sup>

Michael Ryan, who succeeded George Stevens as WA Station Master in 1895, brought his family to Eucla when his new residence was completed. In December 1899, three of his children were attendants at the wedding of one of his operators, Arthur Sheard, to May Barker, the sister-in-law of operator Frank Juncken. As Resident Magistrate for the district, Ryan officiated at the ceremony, while his wife, together with the bride's sister and the wife of Telegraphist Wills, attended the bride. Mrs Ryan was another daughter of William Graham, Station Master at Eyre. In all, it was a community knit together by more than just proximity in isolated conditions.<sup>36</sup>

The telegraph staffs of the two States at Eucla were amalgamated in 1905, as dual control was not proving satisfactory. The West Australian Postmaster's Department assumed control of the operation. In 1907, automatic boosting on the Line was introduced, and the Eucla staff was reduced to six, at which number it remained. It is not clear what tasks they continued to perform after automatic boosting was introduced, but at least two of the staff would have been linemen, and the remaining four may have maintained the equipment and batteries and handled the administration work and any manual boosting required from time to time. In 1923, accommodation facilities at Eucla were improved with the additions of bathrooms in the Telegraph Station Building, and the construction of a detached stone billiard room on Lot 73, near the single-men's quarters. The contract for this work was awarded to Alex Anderson at a cost of £898-19-0.<sup>37</sup>

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. Eucla 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>38</sup> The coastal plain had been eroded by the incursion of rabbits, and sand drifts had begun to encroach on the buildings even before they were abandoned. 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>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> [Eucla Recorder, 15 October 1898, pp. 1-3.](#)

<sup>35</sup> [West Australian Government Gazette, 15 May 1903, p. 1124.](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Eucla Recorder, 9 December 1899, p. 4.](#)

<sup>37</sup> PWD Plan 22387, 3 sheets, 1901-1923, 'Eucla Post Office additions: New Billiard Room & Bathrooms' and site plan, signed and dated by contractor A. W. Anderson, 13 February 1923, National Archives, K1209, Folder 19, Eucla Post Office; [West Australian Government Gazette, 16 February 1923, p. 278.](#)

<sup>38</sup> Information of telegraphist R. Pitcher, 1966, National Archives file K1209, Folder 15, Eucla.

<sup>39</sup> Telephone conversation with Harvey Gurney, Moopina Station, 20 September 2002.

No information has been located regarding the use of the place from 1927 to 1945, and it is likely that the place was mostly vacant. There was evidence of squatters during this period.<sup>40</sup>

In 1945, Eucla Lots 71-78 and 98 were purchased by pastoralist Felix Albert Simon.<sup>41</sup> In 1949, brothers Frederick Edward Benjamin (Roy) Gurney and Cyril Reginald Gurney purchased the buildings.<sup>42</sup> The Gurneys owned Koonalda Station in South Australia. Building materials were in short supply after World War Two, and the Eucla station buildings were purchased to obtain materials for use at Koonalda. A number of the minor buildings were demolished for this purpose, while Roy and Dorothy Gurney and their family of two boys and three girls moved into the former residence of the West Australian Telegraph Master and ran a wayside house for travellers in the former telegraph complex. The Telegraph Station Office was fitted out for accommodation. Dorothy Gurney provided meals for the travellers who stayed overnight, serving them in one room of their residence reserved for the purpose. Some of the rooms in the South Australian Telegraph Master's residence had had floorboards, doors and windows removed, but one intact room was used as a schoolroom, where the Gurney children took correspondence lessons. These were generally overseen by their mother, but occasionally a retired teacher took on the task for a six-month period.<sup>43</sup>

In July 1958, a stone obelisk, carved in Subiaco, was erected at Eucla Pass by Australia Post to the memory of the men of the Telegraph Line.<sup>44</sup>

By the late 1950s, the sand drifts were seriously damaging the buildings, piling onto the roofs and breaking window glass, and the Gurneys were unable to continue operating the wayside house under the conditions. In late 1959, they began to build the Eucla Pass Motel using materials from the Telegraph Station Office and the South Australian Telegraph Master's residence. In order to undertake the project the Gurneys were required to lease the Moopina Station property, which included the Eucla townsite and the Motel site. The Motel was built about five kilometres inland from *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)*, away from the sand dunes. It was ready for occupation in time for the 1962 Empire Games in Perth and accommodated many people travelling along the Eyre Highway to Perth for the occasion, and back again. The Gurneys lived in quarters at the rear of the Motel from 1962, leaving their former residence to the depredations of the sand.<sup>45</sup>

Roy Gurney established a small museum of telegraph station artefacts in the dining room of the Eucla Pass Motel, with the assistance of the Perth Post Office. Copies of the *Eucla Recorder*, the printing press on which it was produced, photographs, a roll of honour of staff who served at Eucla, telegraphists' time books, and the brass plaque which marked William Bailey's grave, were some of the items put on display.<sup>46</sup>

In 1968, Roy and Dorothy Gurney retired and the Motel was sold. It was purchased by the owners of the Amber Motel, constructed at Eucla Pass

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40 Telephone conversation with Harvey Gurney, Moopina Station, 2 April 2003.

41 Certificates of Title, Vol. 430 Fol 163 (Lots 71-73) & Vol. 1084 Fol. 643 (Lots 74-77 & 98).

42 Certificate of Title, Vol 1088 Fol. 545.

43 Harvey Gurney, op cit.

44 *West Australian*, 'Obelisk marks a great endeavour', [July 1958], PR 4519; Photographs of the monument, PR 4519.

45 Harvey Gurney, op cit; Photographs, Eucla telegraph station buildings, 1948 (2) and 1957, National Archives File K1209, Folder 4, Eucla Post Office.

46 *West Australian*, 14 September 1961; *APO Magazine*, Feb-March 1962, p. 13.

about 1966-67, and used as accommodation for backpackers and the like, while the quarters at the rear were occupied by motel staff.<sup>47</sup> Harvey Gurney, Roy and Dorothy Gurney's eldest son, took over Moopina Station, where he lives with his wife Nancy. The homestead they constructed on the place in 1968 utilised the rafters, joists and flooring from the Old Eucla Telegraph Station (1880) and *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)*.<sup>48</sup>

In 1978, *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* was entered on the Register of the National Estate as part of the entry for the Eucla Area, which includes the station ruin, Eucla jetty ruin, Delisser Sandhills and Wilson's Bluff.<sup>49</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>50</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>51</sup>

As well as the ruins of the West Australian Telegraph Master's residence, the physical inspection of the site located remnants of two other stone buildings. The position of these indicates that they are most likely the remains of the South Australian Telegraph Master's residence (marked as 'west remnants' on the site diagram) and the billiard room (marked as 'east remnants'). Foundations of the other buildings most likely still exist under the sand dunes.<sup>52</sup> Also under the sand dunes are the four underground water tanks, and a small graveyard, its location given as 'a short distance west of the W.A. Stationmaster's house'. Reserve 8753, described as Eucla Lot 31, was gazetted for a cemetery in 1903, and, presumably, is where the graveyard is located.<sup>53</sup> Buried here are John Muir, past resident of the station, who fell ill with pneumonia and died in June 1878, and three infants born at Eucla.<sup>54</sup> One of the infants was Arthur Jeffery, the 11-month old son of a WA telegraphist, who died of convulsions in 1906. The child was the grandson of Jonathon Parish, the Post and Telegraph Department foreman who had worked on the construction of the telegraph line in 1875.<sup>55</sup>

In 2002, *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is a tourist attraction, and is subject to some ongoing damage by souvenir hunters.

## 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

<sup>47</sup> Harvey Gurney, op cit.

<sup>48</sup> *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> [Register of the National Estate, Database no. 009809, registered 21 March 1978.](#)

<sup>50</sup> Institution of Engineers, Australia, WA Division, op cit.

<sup>51</sup> Institution of Engineers, Australia, WA Division, op cit, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Physical evidence; PWD plan 22387, 1905 site plan and c.1900 site plan, National Archives, K1209, Folder 19, Eucla Post Office.

<sup>53</sup> [West Australian Government Gazette, 19 June 1903, p. 1610.](#)

<sup>54</sup> *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> [Jeffery, Chris, op cit.](#)

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is located on the south side of Eyre Highway, four kilometres south of Eucla Pass and 12 kilometres west of the South Australian border. *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is an integral element within the coastal sand dune landscape, marked by the two limestone chimney remains and the adjacent grove of Eucalypt trees in the otherwise predominantly barren sand dunes, only one kilometre from the Southern Ocean. A dirt track from Eucla Pass terminates at a large area that forms a carpark. From the carpark, there is no defined route to *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* as the sand dunes drift substantially over any given period.

Approximately 50 metres south of the ruin are two separate sites (west and east) that evidence other buildings. The evidence is not much more than piles of face limestone blocks, with small sections of wall on the remains to the west. In line with those remains, parallel along the coast, at regular intervals, are a number of steel telegraph posts.

There are not enough remains of *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* to indicate any particular architectural style, although historical photographs indicate that the building was designed in a simple interpretation of Federation Free style.

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* comprises the ruin of a telegraph station residence and two unidentified remnants of other telegraph station buildings.

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is a single-storey face limestone construction with two limestone chimneys still in place. The face limestone is regular in shape and laid in random coursing with quoined corners and openings of larger smooth faced regular limestone blocks. There is some evidence of line pointing on part of the front wall. The external limestone face walls show evidence of the tooling and quarrying of the stone on the face of the blocks. There is some graffiti evident.

The footprint of *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is rectangular with rooms under the 'front' verandah on the east, and a recess on the south side suggesting there may have been a verandah there to make the rectangular form complete.

The interior layout is evidenced by the tops of the walls, where they are apparent in the sand dunes. The tapered walls on the east frontage show that there are two rooms under a skillion roof, at each end, of the verandah at the front (east). Within the recessed section of the verandah is an opening that accesses a corridor with rooms each side. The two equal sized rooms on the south side have back-to-back fireplaces. On the north side, there are two rooms off the corridor, the second room has a fireplace on the west wall, back to back with another room on the west side. The corridor turns left (south) and extends to the external wall, where it opens onto possibly a verandah. On the right of the corridor (west), is another room, with a fireplace on the south wall.

The remaining interior walls are hard plaster. There is considerable damage from weathering and graffiti. The back-to-back fireplaces that are evident on the south side, show that the vertical edge to the chimney was a stop chamfered detail finished in concrete. There are no original fitouts remaining in the place.

*Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is generally in fair condition. It is open to the elements, and has been for over fifty years, with no work undertaken at all. The dunes shift around the ruins, revealing more or less of the building ruins at different times.

The remains show minimal evidence of change, and clearly demonstrate the layout and residential nature of the place. *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* has a high degree of integrity as a ruin.

The remains of the place are substantially intact and demonstrate a high degree of authenticity.

The east and west remnants 50.0 metres to the south of *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* are of considerable heritage significance.

### 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 the direction of Chief Architect George Temple Poole. *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* is one of a number of telegraph stations that was abandoned by the Government in 1927, and whose material was subsequently used for the construction of other buildings.

The other telegraph station buildings on the East-West line and constructed in 1896-1898, include *Israelite Bay Post & Telegraph Station (Ruin)* (Registered, HCWA Place 836); Bremer Bay Telegraph Station (HCWA Place 1248), occupied as a private residence and in good condition but roofed with aluminium tiles; and, *Eyre Bird Observatory* (HCWA Place 16522), occupied since 1976 as the Eyre Bird Sanctuary with one room used as a museum of its former history. 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), occupied as a museum.

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

The Eucla Telegraph Station (c.1877) is rare as a relatively substantial telegraph station as it had to house the staff of both the Western Australian and South Australian offices.

### 13.4 REFERENCES

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### 13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Archaeological research should be able to uncover the underground water tanks, the substructure of buildings that have been removed and locate the cemetery.