



HERITAGE  
COUNCIL  
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

**DRAFT – Register Entry**

1. **DATA BASE No.** 516
2. **NAME** *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/Rottnest Island* (1831; 1839; 1841; 1842; 1844; 1846; 1847; 1849; 1851; 1857; 1859; 1863; 1864; 1867; 1870; 1871; 1879; 1881; 1890; 1892; 1895; 1898; 1901; 1919; 1930; 1934; 1935; 1936; 1946; 1953; 1966; 1967; 1987; 1992)  
**FORMER NAME (or OTHER NAMES)** Wadjemup; The Settlement
3. **LOCATION** Thomson Bay, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, 20km west from Fremantle
4. **DESCRIPTION OF PLACE INCLUDED IN THIS ENTRY**  
Part of Reserve 16713 comprising portion of Lot 10976 on Deposited Plan 216860 being part of the land contained in Crown Land Title Volume LR3096 Folio 976 and portion of Lot 11022 on Deposited Plan 216932 being part of the land contained in Crown Land Title Volume LR3096 Folio 921.
5. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA** City of Cockburn
6. **CURRENT OWNER**  
State of Western Australia (Responsible Agency: Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; Management Order: Rottnest Island Authority)
7. **HERITAGE LISTINGS**
  - Register of Heritage Places: Interim 03/07/1992
  - National Trust Classification: Classified 11/06/1973
  - Town Planning Scheme: -----
  - Municipal Inventory: -----
  - Register of the National Estate: -----
  - Aboriginal Sites Register Registered  
P3781 Wadjemup Aboriginal Prisoners Cemetery (Rottnest)  
P3540 Rottnest: Lodge/Quod
8. **ORDERS UNDER SECTION OF THE ACT**  
-----

## 9. HERITAGE AGREEMENT

-----

## 10. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*, comprising buildings, roads, paths, walls, engineering structures, plantings, jetties, archaeological sites and a portion of Garden Lake on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, relating to the following phases of development: Aboriginal Prison (1838–1902), Seafaring (1848–1903), Boy's Reformatory (1881–1901), Governor's Summer Residence (1848–1913), Recreation (1902 to the present ) and Military use (1914–1915; 1934–1945), has cultural heritage significance for the following reasons:

collectively, the individual components form a cultural environment, which possesses significant aesthetic qualities that are heightened by natural landscape and marine features. The place is unique in the way in which so many very significant cultural elements are concentrated in a single place. Similar individual attributes are found in many places, but the combination on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island is unique;

the place contains the only purpose-built Aboriginal Prison constructed in Australia and the nineteenth century prison facilities of the Quod remain highly intact;

the place contains key elements of the Aboriginal Prison established on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island. With a brutal reputation, the Prison was used by the Colonial government as an actual and symbolic means to defeat Aboriginal resistance to colonisation in the State. As a site of exile and often death for Aboriginal men under Colonial law from 1838-1931, the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground and the Quod are particularly significant to the Aboriginal people of Western Australia;

the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground, unmarked for over a century, is believed to have been the site of more Aboriginal deaths in custody than any other location in the State or nation;

the place holds significance for Aboriginal people as a place of remembrance and as a symbol of social protest due to its associations with incarceration and Aboriginal deaths in custody, which reflects the impact of Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island and the prison system on the deterioration of Aboriginal wellbeing since colonisation. The removal of Aboriginal men and boys, many of whom were significant figures, warriors and elders, from their traditional lands caused catastrophic damage to traditional knowledge and culture across the State, which has had lasting ramifications for Western Australian Aboriginal people to the present day;

as the main entry point to Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, the place has iconic landmark aesthetic values when viewed from the water. The place has an important place in Western Australians' sense of identity and as a visitor's destination and is highly valued by the general community for its social and recreational associations and as an iconic holiday destination;

the place contains a rare surviving example of a large group of buildings constructed in the early and middle part of the 19th century that have not only survived but have been adapted to serve continuous use. The unified

group of buildings along Vincent Way are simple in form and construction, derived from local materials and conditions, in harmony with the landscape setting of Moreton Bay fig trees and olive trees;

the functions of the Aboriginal Prison, the Boys' Reformatory and the pilot boat service, are all represented in the built environment in a legible way, and represent a series of practices that were either discontinued or are no longer common in this State;

The buildings and elements from the period Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island operated as a Aboriginal Prison demonstrate the role of Aboriginal labour in the development of Western Australia and is reflective of development elsewhere where Aboriginal labour was utilised, yet not acknowledged;

Hotel Rottnest (fmr Governor's Residence) was a seat of Government from the 1860s through to the early 20th century when Colonial Governors were in residence. The 1920s conversion of the former summer residence of the Governor of Western Australia to tourist accommodation, and its subsequent use as a hotel from the 1950s has enhanced its aesthetic, historic and social value to the people of Western Australia;

The buildings and elements from the period Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island operated as a Aboriginal Prison demonstrate the planning and development of a nineteenth century island penal establishment. The regimented and hierarchical layout of the former Superintendent's Residence (Cottages F & G), Second Superintendent's Quarters (Manager's Residence) and cottages located along the sea wall with the Quod, former Mill and Hay Store (Museum) and archaeological remnants of the fenced gardens behind, demonstrates both the self-sufficiency of the settlement as well as the harsh conditions faced by the inmates. Collectively, the buildings from this period, including the Boys' Reformatory, the Pilot Station and Governor's Residence, are a remarkably intact example of a British colonial outpost established from the 1830s in the formative years of the Swan River Colony;

The methods of construction used in the roof systems of the former Superintendent's Residence (Cottages F & G), Second Superintendent's Quarters (Manager's Residence) and cottages located along the sea wall are rare in Western Australia, with the use of stone and split timber trusses, commonly referred to as 'Vincent's Trusses'; and,

reflecting the importance of the offshore location of Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, the place is valued for its role in housing internees and prisoners of war during World War I, as an annex of Fremantle Prison, its importance in Australia's World War II national coastal defence system, and more recently, its use to quarantine returned Australians during the Covid-19 pandemic



HERITAGE  
COUNCIL  
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

**DRAFT – Assessment Documentation**

### 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Cultural heritage significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for individuals or groups within Western Australia.

In determining cultural heritage significance, the Heritage Council has had regard to the factors in the *Heritage Act 2018* and the indicators adopted on 14 June 2019.

#### 11(a) Importance in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of Western Australia's history

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottneest Island* is associated with the very earliest periods of exploration of Australia by Dutch, French and English explorers, and later by the Dutch East India Company, who after accidentally coming across it, used its presence on the coast of New Holland (Western Australia) as a navigational aid.

As an Aboriginal prison with a brutal reputation, the Quod, and Wadjemup/ Rottneest Island more widely, was used by the Colonial government as an actual and symbolic means to defeat Aboriginal resistance to colonisation in the State. As the site from 1838-1931 of exile, and often death, of Aboriginal men, many from the North-West, it illustrates the Colonial and later State Governments' policies on incarceration of Aboriginal people and methods of dealing with the Aboriginal resistance to the invasion of their country.

Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground, unmarked for over a century, and believed to have been the site of more Aboriginal deaths in custody than any other location in the State or nation, reflecting the impact of the place, and the prison system more generally, on the deterioration of Aboriginal wellbeing since British colonisation.

The buildings and elements dating from the period Wadjemup/ Rottneest Island operated as a Aboriginal Prison demonstrate the planning and development of a nineteenth century island penal establishment. The regimented and hierarchical layout of the former Superintendent's Residence (Cottages F & G), Second Superintendent's Quarters (Manager's Residence) and cottages located along the sea wall with the Quod, former Mill and Hay Store (Museum) and archaeological remnants of the fenced gardens behind, demonstrates both the self-sufficiency of the settlement as well as the harsh conditions faced by the inmates. Collectively, the buildings from this period, including the Boys' Reformatory, the Pilot Station

and Governor's Residence, are a remarkably intact example of a British colonial outpost established from the 1830s in the formative years of the Swan River Colony.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* demonstrates the role of Aboriginal labour in the development of Western Australia. Aboriginal prisoners provided most of the manpower that sourced the raw materials for and built the main buildings, structures and road infrastructure within Thomson Bay Settlement, which is reflective of development elsewhere in Western Australia where Aboriginal labour was utilised, yet not acknowledged.

The landscape of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* comprises a density and diversity of cultural features that illustrate human occupation and the evolution of the place from early colonial settlement to the present. The range of features includes the planning and layout of the area; roads and tracks laid down in the nineteenth century that remain in use; garden walls which defined former cottage subdivisions and Governor's Residence (Hotel Rottnest) domain; engineering structures such as the causeway, the cutting through View Hill ridge, wells and water tunnels and underground tank, jetties; and archaeological sites. The layers of settlement are also reflected by the discernible remnant native vegetation which has survived from the early colonial settlement period; remnant plantings of nineteenth century agricultural crops; abandoned cultivation areas from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and extensive early twentieth century plantings of ornamental trees.

The place is associated with the Pilot service that guided ships into Fremantle Harbour for over fifty years.

The place played an important role in housing internees and prisoners of war during World War I, in maintaining Australia's World War II national coastal defence system and more recently, as a quarantine facility for returned Australians during the Covid-19 pandemic.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is associated with the Colonial and State Governors. The original rendered stone wall defining the Government House Domain surrounding the Government Residence is still extant reflecting the importance of the site as the seat of Government for the period of time when Colonial Governors were in residence.

The 1920s conversion of the former summer residence of the Governor of Western Australia and other buildings in the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* to tourist accommodation demonstrates the development of Western Australia's tourist and recreational resources in the early part of the 20th century.

Demonstrating and reflecting the importance of the coastal location of Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is valued for its role in housing internees and prisoners of war during World War I, its importance in Australia's World War II national coastal defence system, as an annex of Fremantle Prison, as a holiday location and more recently, its use to quarantine returned Australians during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**11(b) Importance in demonstrating rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of Western Australia's heritage**

The unique combination of historical overlays has created a unique cultural landscape at *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. It is also rare in demonstrating a distinctive way of life which is of exceptional interest to the State, through the place's association with the *Aboriginal Prison*, and its function as a major public recreational resort.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* contains the only purpose-built Aboriginal Prison in Australia. The construction and operation of the *Aboriginal Prison* demonstrates the attitudes towards and treatment of Aboriginal prisoners and the administration of prison establishments from colonial settlement of the Swan River Colony from the 1830s to the 1930s.

The importance and significance of the *Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground* to Aboriginal people can be considered fairly unique as a site of memorial significance for Aboriginal people throughout the state.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is a rare example of a complex archaeological landscape that encompasses pre-colonial Aboriginal occupation, and the range of activities undertaken on and around the island after colonial settlement including the prison era, use by the Department of Defence and as a holiday destination.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* contains a collection of unusual structures of comparatively early vintage representing some of Western Australia's earliest surviving fabric close to the main population centre. These structures are also rare because of their continuity of use since their construction, and are rare on a national level as a large collection of rare buildings, concentrated in a sea wall environment, rather than a harbour environment.

The methods of construction used in the roof systems of former Superintendent's Residence (Cottages F & G), Second Superintendent's Quarters (Manager's Residence) and cottages located along the sea wall are rare in Western Australia, with the use of stone and split timber trusses, commonly referred to as 'Vincent's Trusses'. These methods, constructed under the direction of Vincent, utilised local materials, and were used at a time when roofs were largely made of rushes or shingles cut from sheoak.

Being situated on an island, *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is unique in the way in which so many very significant cultural elements are concentrated in a single place. Similar individual attributes are found in many places, but the combination on *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is unique.

The functions of the *Aboriginal Prison*, *Boys' Reformatory School*, and *Pilot Boat* service, are all represented in the built environment in a legible way, and represent a series of practices that were either discontinued or are no longer common in this State

The *Governor's Residence (Hotel Rottnest)* is one of only two purpose built retreats for a colonial administrator in the Australian colonies, and a rare demonstration of a particular feature of the British Empire. The use of the former residence is still

evident, and it remains the most impressive building on the Island, with its crenelated parapets forming a distinctive landmark overlooking Thomson Bay.

The quokka (*Setonix brachyurus*) is the most well-known animal on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island. It is the sole representative of the genus *Setonix*. There are limited populations remaining in south-western Australia, with the largest population located on the island, with interactions common within *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. The quokka has become a beloved symbol of tourism on the island.

**11(c) Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Western Australia's history;**

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has importance for its contribution to a wider understanding of natural and cultural history by virtue of its potential as a teaching site for the study of the natural terrestrial and marine environment; Aboriginal post-contact period; nineteenth and twentieth century social history; history of Colonial architecture and building construction; landscape and horticultural history.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has archaeological potential to reveal more about: the construction and operation of the Quod and Reformatory; the Aboriginal prison experience, and the lives, traditions and deaths of the Aboriginal prisoners now buried in the Aboriginal cemetery; the operation of the salt works designed by Henri Couderot; the internment of Germans, Austrians and Dalmatians during World War I; and, the operation of the military defences during World War II.

Buildings constructed in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* under the supervision of Superintendent Vincent provide thermal insulation through flat limestone roofs supported on timber boards and split jarrah trusses ('Vincent Trusses'), a rare form of construction in Western Australia.

**11(d) Its importance in demonstrating the characteristics of a broader class of places;**

The evolution of development within *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* demonstrates a series of historic, architectural and social changes and, in many instances, these layers are quite legible in a single place. The relationships between the buildings, spaces and pathways from the period Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island operated as a Aboriginal Prison remain extant, although now utilised for very different functions. Fabric was made to adapt to new purposes, but left strong messages of, and clues to, previous uses.

Built with prison labour, the Sea Wall, Superintendent's Residence, Pilot's Quarters, Second Superintendent Quarters and Salt Store overlooking the bay, with Stores, Mill behind and the Quod set back behind a formal square all speak to the highly regimented and largely self-sufficient life of the colonial island outpost.

The natural environment of *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is characteristic of other arid marine island environments off the Western Australian coast, while having distinctive features which also make it unique. The buildings, planning, planting

designs and social patterns within *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*, while exhibiting features which are a response to the island environment were also derived from the wider community influence on the mainland and as such are representative of their time and place.

The development of the place is representative of individual classes of use and development of its time that were common practice in a much broader context. The 1920s conversion of the Governor's Residence to tourism accommodation and its subsequent hotel use from the 1950s, reflects the adaptations made to many grand residences in response to increased costs of upkeep and the burgeoning Western Australian tourism industry.

The conversion of the Governor's Residence (Hotel Rottnest), Boys' Reformatory, Quarters buildings and cottages to hotel, hostel and cottage accommodation and the institution of campgrounds *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has created a holiday village aesthetic that has considerable importance to both visitors to the State as well as the people of Western Australia as the centre of *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* as an icon of Western Australia.

**11(e) Any strong or special meaning it may have for any group or community because of social, cultural or spiritual associations;**

Located on *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has cultural value to the Whadjuk and Noongar people of the South-West as an area occupied by their ancestors prior to its separation of *Wadjemup* from the mainland.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is important to Aboriginal communities throughout the State, and to individual Aboriginal people, whose ancestors were imprisoned and buried there. The Quod and the *Wadjemup* Aboriginal Burial Ground hold particular significance for the Aboriginal community. The majority of the limestone buildings in the *Thomson Bay Settlement* were constructed with forced Aboriginal prison labour.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has significance for Aboriginal people of Western Australia as place of remembrance. Individual focusses for remembrance include the Quod, *Wadjemup* Aboriginal Burial Ground, the former Hospital, Stables, Boat Shed Transit Cell and Vlamingh Lookout. *Thomson Bay Settlement* also remains a symbol of social protest, following the protest on *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* on 10 March 1988. The purpose was to bring attention to the Aboriginal presence in Australia before 1788 during the Bicentenary, recognition of the history of *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* as an Aboriginal prison and, specifically, the commemoration of the Aboriginal burial site on *Wadjemup*. *Wadjemup* is of cultural and spiritual significance to Noongar people as a place where the spirits of deceased ancestors travelled after death and is *winnaitch* (a place that should be avoided).

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is significant to large numbers of Western Australians. The island is one of those places which Western Australian's regard as part of the State's identity, reflecting deep-rooted community sentiment attached to use and enjoyment of the island as a recreational resource and its high degree of accessibility across the social spectrum. This includes the

perception of egalitarian values, island culture, values and lifestyle, often tempered by experiences through childhood and adolescence and the propensity of these memories and experiences to become increasingly cherished through time.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has associations with a large number of people who were noteworthy because of their contribution to the development of the island and for their standing in the community, including prison superintendents; members of the controlling authority; governors; island managers; as well as groups such as the Winnit Club, YMCA, Boy Scouts and Rottnest Island Volunteer Group.

As the main point of entry onto the island, and with landmark values from the seaward approach, *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* contributes significantly to the overall sense of place of the island. The natural environment within the Settlement, including interaction with the quokka population, holds an important place in the experience of visitors to Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island. The place is also the centre of commercial activity and tourist information.

**11(f)<sup>1</sup> Its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by any group or community;**

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is characterised by a sweeping bay marked by the sea wall and distinctive limestone colonial buildings creating a defined sense of place valued by both visitors to the State as well as the people of Western Australia.

As a precinct, *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* possesses aesthetic qualities of a high order. These qualities are heightened by landscape features, especially the mature, native and exotic trees. Somerville's avenues of trees have been designed to both contrast and complement the natural vegetation and built form and continue to provide scenic pathways in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* and to the Basin. Many of the individual buildings, though simple in composition and execution, exhibit qualities that are aesthetically pleasing; including the stone cottages (Cottages E, F, G, H, J, K1, K2, Board Cottage, Manager's Cottage) and the Quod in their respective present forms.

The various landscape features and elements, including the layout of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*; the island character and topography; the buildings and the planting stock, contribute to the aesthetic quality and character of the place and together form a unique environment which has townscape, streetscape and landmark qualities

Though designed without having an overall plan in mind, the bulk of the buildings operate together as a harmonious whole or in groups. Combined with the natural

---

<sup>1</sup> For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. A *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

landscape and marine environment, and the introduced plantings, *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* possesses high scenic value.

**11(g) Any special association it may have with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in Western Australia's history;**

Aboriginal men and boys, many of whom were significant figures, warriors and elders of their communities across Western Australia, were incarcerated and died on *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. Their removal from their traditional lands caused catastrophic damage to traditional knowledge and culture across the State, which has had lasting ramifications for Western Australian Aboriginal people to the present day.

Parts of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* have close association with Henry Vincent, under whose brutal regime many of the places were constructed. These were created and built with forced Aboriginal prisoner labour under his direction, or were the execution of designs by others. As Superintendent of the Rottnest Island Aboriginal Penal Establishment from 1839 to 1849 and again from 1856 to 1867, Vincent is remembered as one of the harshest gaolers in Australian history.

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is associated with Dutch mariner, Willem de Vlamingh (Waeckende Boey), from whose 1697 expedition the name 'Rottenest', meaning rat's nest, which is understood to refer to the marsupial quokkas, originated. The name remains in use today. The journals of De Vlamingh from this expedition along the coast are among the earliest recorded observations of the Australian Aboriginal people by Europeans.

A great number of individuals have been associated with the island and the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* in an official capacity and had a significant impact on the development of the place including: architect Richard Roach Jewell; John Forrest (later Lord) who proposed the commercial growing of pines in 1883; Superintendent William Temperley who was influential in developing the cultural life of the prison establishment and the enjoyment of the island's scenic features; John Ednie Brown, the first Conservator of the Woods and Forests Department, who directed the first major amenity plantings in *Thomson Bay Settlement*; Colonial Secretary James Connolly (later Sir), who was responsible for the initial development of the island as a public resort and gave direction to the early work undertaken prior to World War I; and William Somerville, who as a member of the Rottnest Island Board, laid the foundations for the plantings which exist today; as well as Governor Bedford, W. Cowan, W.R. Bilsborough, Joseph Allen, Tom Sten, William Jackson, John Watson, and Henri Courderot, as well as Island Managers, James Stark and Des Sullivan.

**11(h) Its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement;**

The extensive nature of the plantings in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* represents a considerable achievement given the extreme conditions under which any planting on the island takes place. The level of creative

achievement is challenging to assess by observation of the present condition of the plantings, because of their age and the fact that the plantings are now incomplete. The plantings were, however, ambitious for the time in the 1900's and 1930's and displayed a level of creativity that was notable in the local context.

The lack of timber on the island led to the development of a distinctive and unusual roof structure for many of the colonial buildings in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* including the Governor's Residence. These roofs, which are still extant on the Superintendent's and Officers' Quarters, Mill and Hay Store, Salt Store, Chapel and Boathouse, used narrowly spaced split beam trusses (known as 'Vincent Trusses') lined with timber boards topped with limestone slabs. This was then covered with a slurry of lime and sand thus successfully using the limited resources available on the Island to achieve weather protection for the limestone buildings.

## 12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

### 12.1 CONDITION

Overall, the condition of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is good. The condition of individual elements within the settlement varies and is summarised in the Physical Evidence.

Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island comprises a complex archaeological landscape which encompasses terrestrial and maritime evidence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal occupation and activities across the island. It is likely that there are considerable intact archaeological deposits and low to moderate artefact scatters dating from colonial settlement to the present across the island and specifically within *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. The significance (or research potential) of areas of known and potential archaeology, including those which comprise Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and both values, has not been assessed.

### 12.2 INTEGRITY

This section explains the extent to which the fabric is in its original state.

The majority of the fabric relates to the two main themes of Aboriginal Prison and the use of the island as a holiday destination.

The buildings and elements from the period Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island operated as an Aboriginal Prison have been modified to varying degrees to enable alternative uses for over 100 years. They nevertheless retain varying degrees of integrity from moderate to high.

Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island has an extremely high degree of integrity as a holiday destination. Since the early 20th century it has been planned and managed as a holiday resort, and this is reflected in the architecture and infrastructure. In 2020 the majority of the buildings in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* continue to be used to support this function.

### 12.3 AUTHENTICITY

This section explains the extent to which the original intention is evident, and the compatibility of current use.

Various modifications have been made to the buildings in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* to accommodate the various uses to which the island has been put over the years. Nonetheless, the history of the place is clearly readable in the remaining fabric, which in the majority relate to the two main themes of Aboriginal Prison and the use of the island as a holiday destination.

The former Aboriginal Prison (the Quod) was closed as tourist accommodation in 2018, which is likely to enhance the authenticity of the building, in relation to the period *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* operated as an Aboriginal Prison.

Various areas of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* have an extremely high degree of authenticity. These include the following:

- The Sea Wall and row of historic buildings along Vincent Way have changed very little since they were completed in the 1840s. The fact that the row of buildings along the Sea Wall is still intact and that no infill or demolition has been carried out since its construction is unique in Australia and makes this vista highly significant for its authenticity.
- The bottom of Signal Hill past the General Store and on to Lomas Cottage has changed very little over time, and includes the historic plantings of Moreton Bay Fig trees and two extremely old olive trees that are a distinctive feature of the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

This document has been compiled by Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage staff, with amendments and/or additions by the Heritage Council and the Department.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Known to Whadjuk Noongar traditional owners as Wadjemup,<sup>2</sup> Wadjemup/Rottnest Island is the largest island on the continental shelf near Perth. Approximately twenty kilometres from Fremantle, it is dominated by low limestone hills and sand dunes, with a coastline characterised by alternating sandy bays and limestone headlands. The limestone and sand were predominantly formed during the Pleistocene and Holocene periods, when the area was still part of the mainland.

The Noongar name for Wadjemup means 'place across the water where the spirits are'<sup>3</sup>. The island was uninhabited when Europeans began arriving in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> However Wadjemup remained then and now a highly significant place for Whadjuk and Noongar people, as a resting place of the spirits.<sup>5</sup>

Wadjemup/Rottnest Island separated from the mainland some 6,500 to 10,000 years ago. A small number of stone artefacts have been found on Wadjemup/Rottnest Island which have been dated to between 13,000 and 18,000 years ago.<sup>6</sup> Recent archaeological research has considered the archaeological record at Wadjemup in the context of the surrounding Greater Swan region, which included Wadjemup, Ngooloomayup/Carnac Island and Meeandip/Garden Island prior to their split from the mainland<sup>7</sup>. The research considered the stone and other artefacts at Wadjemup as well as radio carbon dated pollen sequences, and other dating techniques, and suggests that Aboriginal Western Australians occupied Greater Swan region, including the submerged land between Wadjemup, Ngooloomayup and Meeandip islands and Perth, for at least 20,000 years.<sup>8</sup> Whadjuk people believe the connection is much longer.

---

<sup>2</sup> Wadjemup is reported to mean 'the place across the water where the spirits are'. (TPG for RIA, 'Rottnest Island (Wadjemup) Cultural Landscape Management Plan', March 2015, p.1)

<sup>3</sup> Rottnest Island Authority, 2018. Source: <https://rottnestisland.com/the-island/about-the-island/our-history/aboriginal-history>, Accessed 2020.

<sup>4</sup> TPG, op cit, pp.9-10

<sup>5</sup> Rottnest Island Authority, 2018. Source: <https://rottnestisland.com/the-island/about-the-island/our-history/aboriginal-history>, Accessed 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Green, N., & Moon, S., *Far from Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1997), p. 12; see also Pearn, J., & Carter, P., (eds.), *Islands of Incarceration* (University of Queensland Press, 1995); Joe Dortch & Charles Dortch, 2019, 'Late Quaternary Aboriginal huntergatherer occupation of the Greater Swan Region, south-western Australia', *Australian Archaeology*, 85:1, 15-29; Dortch, C., 'Rottnest and Garden Island Prehistory and the Archaeological Potential of the Adjacent Continental Shelf, Western Australia', *Australian Archaeology* 33, pp. 38-43

<sup>7</sup> Dortch and Dortch define Greater Swan Region as a 60-km-long and 40-km-wide, east-West transect from the Darling Escarpment through the centre of the Perth Metropolitan Region to the coast, and thence seaward to the deepening contours of the continental shelf edge, ten kilometres west of Rottnest Island. No stone artefacts have been found on Carnac Island. Dortch, Charles & Joe Dortch 2012, 'Archaeological evidence for early human presence in the western reaches of the Greater Swan Region, WA', *Fremantle Studies*, 7: 51-76; Dortch & Dortch, 2019, op cit, pp 15-29

<sup>8</sup> Further, additional archaeological evidence of Aboriginal occupation of Wadjemup is likely to be present in areas of former likely occupation. Dortch & Dortch 2019 op cit.

## Europeans Arrive

European knowledge of Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island commenced in 1611 with Dutch navigators in search of a shorter route from the Cape of Good Hope to Batavia (now Jakarta). Frederick de Houtman made observations of the island in 1619, while the first Europeans to land are believed to have been Samuel Volkerson and his crew of the *Waeckende Boey*, searching for survivors of the *Vergulde Draek* in 1658. William de Vlamingh, also searching for a missing ship, landed on the mainland in 1697 and also landed on and explored Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island.<sup>9</sup>

The most common story about Wadjemup's colonial name ascribes it to Willem de Vlamingh who, on 29 December 1696, mistook quokkas for large rats ('rattenest': 'rat's nest'). However, de Vlamingh's log contains no reference to rats, referring only to 'mist eiland' (fog island). The name probably originated from another member of this expedition.<sup>10</sup>

In 1786, while following the Dutch route to the Indies, Duquesne-Guitton Abraham, leading the French ships *L'Oiseau* and *La Loire*, accidentally sighted the Western Australian coast at latitude 32° and quickly departed. Other Europeans who landed included members of Nicholas Baudin's expeditions (1801, 1803), Phillip Parker King (1822), and Captain James Stirling (1827).

After the establishment by the British of the Swan River Colony in 1829, Europeans soon settled on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, attracted by the prospects of salt harvesting, farming and fishing. In December 1830, Benjamin Smyth surveyed Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island for the Surveyor General, John Septimus Roe. A plan for the township to be known as Kingstown was proposed, containing 177 lots of one third of an acre and other lots of 10 acres to be offered to the public. These lots were contained within the area now known as Thomson Bay and extended around to what became Bickley Bay on the site where Kingstown Barracks<sup>11</sup> now stands.<sup>12</sup>

William Nairne Clarke and Robert Thomson took up town lots and pastureland. Clarke was granted ten acres in 1831 and later received a grant of 300 acres for pasturing sheep. Thomson took 100 acres for the purposes of farming and salt collection. He moved his family from Fremantle to Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island in 1831 and constructed several farm buildings from local limestone. A well and the footings of a stone building are located at the site of Thomson's allotment, approximately 1.3km west of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/Rottnest Island* and have traditionally been interpreted as relating to Thomson's occupation<sup>13</sup>. However, recent refurbishment of the well, as well as archaeological investigations in the area, suggest the structures may have been constructed after Thomson's era, possibly during the military occupation of the island during World War II.<sup>14</sup>

---

9 TPG op.cit, p.15

10 Somerville, W., *Rottnest Island: Its History and Legends* (Perth: Rottnest Board, 1948), p. 31, citing *Extract from the Journals of a Voyage Made to the Unexplored South Land...* (Amsterdam, 1701); Joske, P., Jeffrey, C., & Hoffman, L., *Rottnest Island: a Documentary History* (Nedlands: Centre for Migration and Development Studies, UWA, 1995), pp. 10-11, 18

11 P525 *Kingstown Barracks* (RHP)

12 Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, p. 7

13 *ibid*, pp. 7-8

14 Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, August 2020, Short Report of an investigation of a Prison Reformatory site on Rottnest Island (Wadjemup); Pers comm, Jane Skippington, RIA December 2020.

Other requests for land continued, such as W. R. Steel's 1834 appeal for exclusive rights over all unallocated parts of the island in exchange for landing 400 sheep. European settlers quickly changed the landscape of Wadjemup. Land was cleared and tracks made; firewood was gathered, especially for the salt works, and the island was repeatedly burned.<sup>15</sup> Cereal farming, vegetable gardens and vineyards were established.

In August 1838, life for the colonists was disrupted when ten Aboriginal prisoners were brought to the island. Although Clarke was willing to trade his holdings for similar land on the mainland, Thomson had opposed plans to use the island as a prison.<sup>16</sup> After a short period when settlers and prisoners coexisted on the Island, the Colonial Secretary announced in June 1839 that Rottnest Island would become a penal establishment for Aboriginal people. The Crown resumed all land<sup>17</sup> and restricted access to the Island, compensating settlers with property on the mainland. For almost a century the place served as a prison for Aboriginal men and boys. During its time as a prison, some 3,700 Aboriginal men and boys, from many parts of the State, were held there.

### **Aboriginal Prison**

Colonial settlement in Western Australia resulted in clashes between the new arrivals and the Aboriginal population. As the colony expanded, Europeans came into increasing conflict with traditional owners. European farming impacted significantly on the ability of Aboriginal people to hunt and gather food in their traditional ways.

Offences under English law, such as killing livestock or petty theft, resulted in gaol sentences from six months to many years. Aboriginal people were also condemned to death or given life imprisonment for intertribal killings or for the murder of Europeans.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, increasing numbers of Aboriginal people were being held in gaols around the Swan River Colony and in rural areas. It was considered necessary to establish a 'Native Prison' and Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island was thought ideal since it would allow the prisoners to be worked in gangs without the chains used on the mainland to prevent escape.<sup>19</sup>

The incarceration of Aboriginal people on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island falls into three phases, as described by historian Neville Green:

The first, 1838–49, might be regarded as a humanitarian period when the intention was not merely to punish but also to rehabilitate the prisoners into colonial society. The second stage, 1855–1902, was a grim period when more than 3,000 prisoners arrived on the Island. In the final stage, 1902–31, Rottnest Island became an annex of Fremantle Prison.<sup>20</sup>

Fremantle's 'Round House' prison (P0896 *Round House and Arthur Head Reserve*) (RHP) was utilised as a lock-up for Aboriginal prisoners on their way to the penal

---

15 Source: [www.rottnestisland.com](http://www.rottnestisland.com) [consulted 2 November 2006]

16 *ibid*

17 *Government Gazette*, 1 June 1839

18 Winder, K.G., 'Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prison and the Burial Sites', prepared for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (1989), p. 1

19 *ibid*

20 Green and Moon 1997:14, cited in TPG *op cit.*, p.21

establishment on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island.<sup>21</sup> In 1838-39, a house of two rooms, twelve feet square, was constructed on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island under the supervision of the Government Establishment, Constable Lawrence Welch. Welch reported that the behaviour of the prisoners was satisfactory and requested more clothing and equipment to prepare for an increased number of inmates.<sup>22</sup> However, he left the post in August 1839, to be replaced by Henry Vincent, former gaoler at Fremantle.

While the justification for establishing an Aboriginal prison on Wadjemup was that prisoners could be 'gradually trained in the habits of civilized life',<sup>23</sup> it is noteworthy that an 1842 proposal to establish an island school was rejected.<sup>24</sup> While some inmates were imprisoned for serious offences such as murder, many more were interned for theft of property such as flour, fruit from gardens, and cattle pastured on their traditional lands.<sup>25</sup> Others were placed on the island because they posed a challenge to white authority. Eanna and Bokoberry had committed 'no particular crime', but were seen by the Protector of Aborigines, Charles Symmons, as 'untameable savage[s]: laughing to scorn the white man's efforts at civilisation'. Rottnest, he hoped, would 'teach them outwardly at least, to conform to our social regulations'. In 1844 Joseph Frazer, an early Christian convert, was sent to Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island for the 'offence' of going walkabout.<sup>26</sup>

There was a brief hiatus of six years during which the establishment was temporarily closed and Aboriginal prisoners were transferred to work in road gangs in Perth. However the reopening of the prison saw the return of Henry Vincent as Superintendent between 1856 and 1867<sup>27</sup>, heralding the beginning of a particularly harsh period. Vincent was widely acknowledged as a cruel and violent superintendent, practising routine brutality towards the prisoners.<sup>28</sup>

One of the consequences of incarceration was that Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island was almost entirely developed by forced Aboriginal labour. Prisoners grew wheat and fodder, cut wood, tended stock, and constructed buildings and roads. They used picks to extract stone, salt, and shell that was burnt to produce lime. Over the prison period, the prisoners constructed a large number of buildings and other structures including the seawall, lighthouses and other heritage buildings. Most of the development took place within *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. Almost all the limestone structures in *Thomson Bay Settlement* were constructed by Aboriginal detainees, mostly under the supervision of Henry Vincent, including:

---

21 Boylen, G., 'Taste of prison at the old port city', *West Australian*, 4 Jan1991 p. 14

22 CSR vol. 71, 28 January 1839

23 Western Australia Act no. 21, 1841: *An Act to Constitute the Island of Rottnest a Legal Prison*

24 Green, N., *Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the Southwest of Australia* (Perth: Focus, 1984), p. 151

25 *Perth Gazette* (1 September 1838); CSO 124/100-105, F. Armstrong to C. Symmons, 6 October 1843; both cited in Joske, Jeffrey, & Hoffman, *Rottnest Island*, pp. 28, 39

26 Green, N., 'Aborigines and White Settlers in the 19th Century', in Stannage, C.T., (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1981), p. 92; McNair, W., & Rumley, H., *Pioneer Aboriginal Mission* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1981), p. 101

27 *Chronological History of Rottnest Island*, prepared for Rottnest Island Authority by Considine and Griffiths Architects and Oline Richards, September 1995, p. 3

28 TPG, op cit., pp.22-23

- c.1841 Superintendent's House, later Government House (Cottages F and G)<sup>29</sup>;
- c.1844 Military Barracks (Cottages E, J and H);
- 1846 Boathouse and Crew's Quarters (fmr) (Board Cottage);
- 1847 Armstrong's Cottage; later Pilot's Quarters (fmr) (now K1 and K2). The 1848–1903 operations of the Pilot Station are discussed in detail below;
- c.1848 (Second) Superintendent's House (Manager's Residence);
- c.1855 Cell Block, Cattle Shed & Stables (Shops)
- c.1856 School and Chapel;
- 1855-1857 Mill and Hay Store (Barn (fmr), now Museum);
- 1859-1864 Government House (Governors' Residence, now Hotel Rottnest). The development of the Governor's Residence is discussed in detail below.
- 1859 Boatshed and Holding Cell, located on beachfront.
- 1863 Catechist (later incorporated into the Boys Reformatory... The 1881–1901 operations of the Reformatory are discussed in detail below;
- 1864 Quod, also known as the Native Prison.<sup>30</sup>
- 1867 Salt Store.

The export of salt was very important to the early colony, as the colonists needed money in order to purchase essential goods, and agricultural exports were slow to develop. Superintendent Vincent organised Aboriginal work parties to bag the salt using picks and shovels, and in 1847 he reported 150 tons were ready for export. Salt was still being exported into the 1930s based primarily on prison labour. The majority of the facilities constructed relating to the production of salt on Wadjemup/Rottnest Island have been demolished, however the Salt Store located just south of the Main Jetty in Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/Rottnest Island is still extant.<sup>31</sup>

In 1864, additional prison accommodation for Aboriginal men was constructed after one of the warders apparently set a fire to flush out an escaped prisoner, which got out of control and damaged several buildings, including the main prison building. The new building, known as the Quod<sup>32</sup>, comprised an octagonal plan with cells and warders quarters, deliberately resembling Fremantle Gaol in terms of plan,

<sup>29</sup> Where appropriate, the current name for the building or element will be provided in brackets following the use of the historical name or names.

<sup>30</sup> Considine and Griffiths Architects Pty Ltd, 1994, Thomson Bay Settlement, Rottnest Island Conservation Plan, prepared for Rottnest Island Authority, Vol 1, pp. 9-13; TPG op cit., p.29

<sup>31</sup> A Salt Works building with a high chimneystack was built by Aboriginal prisoners in 1869, however by 1898 an inquiry found it was not viable. Although refining stopped, gathering, grinding, bagging and carting by rail from the Salt Works using prisoner labour continued. The Salt Works were demolished after World War II, the stack in 1947 and the buildings in 1959. Joske, Jeffery & Hoffman, *Rottnest Island*, p. 131

<sup>32</sup> After the conversion to holiday accommodation, the Quod, along with the adjacent former Boys Reformatory building and additional facilities built much later, was also known as the Lodge.

form and construction. The use of the term Quod is an old slang for prison and did not relate to the geometry of the building.<sup>33</sup>

The lives of Aboriginal prisoners were harsh. Recaptured escapees received many lashes and were kept in heavy irons. In 1846, a French priest described Aboriginal people of all ages being taken to Rottnest in chains: 'These poor unfortunates... are sent there for the least fault... [But] their stay... only serves to brutalise them.'<sup>34</sup> Overcrowded, poorly ventilated cells, inadequate food and warmth, and overseer brutality led to a death rate of at least 10%. A State Commission noted that the superintendent had fed vegetables to horses whilst prisoners suffered nutritional diseases. Vincent was accused of beating and murdering prisoners, but despite substantial evidence he was never charged.<sup>35</sup> In 1866, an inspection found that Vincent was 'suffering the effects of a long arduous service' and he retired the following year.<sup>36</sup>

After Henry Vincent retired Captain William Dockwery Jackson took over as prison superintendent. Additional elements constructed by the prisoners during this period included:

- 1867 Pilot Boat Crew's Kitchen (Cottage M);
- 1870s additions and alterations to Government House (later Hotel Rottnest);
- 1870s construction of stone Sea Walls;
- 1871 Coxswain's Cottage (Cottage L);
- 1871 Lomas Cottage, constructed for ex-convict S.B. Lomas on Colonial Secretary's request (also known as Buckingham Cottage);
- 1884 Hospital and Laundry (fmr) (Staff Amenities at the Lodge)<sup>37</sup>.

By this time the prison was overcrowded. Prisoners were brought from all over the Colony and disease spread easily in the cramped conditions.<sup>38</sup> In 1875 the press referred to Rottnest as the 'Black Man's Grave'. Disease killed many, the worse incident being the death of 60 prisoners from influenza in the winter of 1883, over a third of the inmates held at the time.<sup>39</sup> Captain Jackson was dismissed, and replaced with W.H. Timperley. It appears the existing unmarked Aboriginal Prison Cemetery which is located northeast of the Quod was extended to the north around this time.<sup>40</sup>

Detainees engineered nine escapes between 1838 and 1916. In 1848 eight men tunneled under the prison and fled by boat. In 1849 many prisoners, incarcerated

33 Considine and Griffiths Architects op.cit., pp. 13-14.

34 L. Fonteinne to Abbot Gueranger, 13 January 1846, in W. Somerville, 'Papers 1900-54', Battye Library, MN1 453A

35 W.N. Clark to Aborigines Protection Society, December 1842, attached to Lord Stanley to Governor Hutt 26 July 1843, *British Parliamentary Papers v.8 Colonies: Australia* no. 11; Watson, 'Rottnest', p. 19

36 Considine and Griffiths, op.cit., p. 14, 16.

37 Ibid. pp. 14

38 TPG op.cit. pp.23-24

39 Watson, E.J., 'History of Rottnest' (Perth, 1937), typescript in Battye Library, p. 90; Green & Moon, *Far from Home*, p. 62; WA Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings* 1899; N. Green to *Subiaco Post* (18 January 1998); Thomas, J., 'Crime and Society' in Stannage, *History*, p. 649

40 Considine and Griffiths, op.cit., p. 17.

within sight of the campfires of their kin, escaped to join an important Aboriginal ceremony on the mainland.<sup>41</sup>

In 1883 inmates were forced to observe the hanging of their comrade, Wangabiddie.<sup>42</sup> He was one of five Aboriginal prisoners who were executed on the island in the late 19th century, all for murder.<sup>43</sup> As European settlement expanded north on the mainland in the 1880s, settlers encountered fresh Aboriginal resistance. Inmates from the Murchison, followed by the Pilbara and finally the Kimberley came to be incarcerated on Wadjemup. For these men, the unfamiliar cold and damp conditions on the Island took their toll.<sup>44</sup>

Many Aboriginal men were sent to Rottnest on the slightest suspicion: twenty-eight men found in the vicinity of speared cattle near Carnarvon were exiled without fair trial. In the face of criticism of such practices, the Legislative Council conceded that many had been illegally sentenced, but nevertheless passed retrospective legislation validating convictions. The prison 'became the final answer for holding those too wild and rebellious to submit' and 'deteriorated into one of the most heinous prison systems in Australia'.<sup>45</sup> Many Aboriginal people believe that the treatment of Aboriginal people in this manner, in particular the public executions, was a deliberate act to traumatise and subjugate the Aboriginal people across the State.<sup>46</sup>

Between 1890 and 1902, Colonel Edward Angelo, and his successor Frederick Pearse oversaw the Aboriginal Prison, and the following works using Aboriginal prisoner labour<sup>47</sup>:

- c.1890 Leading Hand Pilot's Quarters (former School House & Quarters, now Staff Quarters);
- clearance of roads across Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, including construction of new road to quarry;
- excavation of shafts and tunnels south of the reform school, thought to have been undertaken c. 1895.<sup>48</sup>

The Rottnest Aboriginal prison formally closed in 1902, as regional gaols were being used instead for the detention of Aboriginal prisoners. However a small number of Aboriginal prisoners remained on the island to undertake agricultural and other labour associated with the survey of the island for the purposes of its use as a pleasure resort. In January 1904, a portion of the island came under

---

41 Ross, 'Rottnest', p. 13; 'Timperley', p. 7; Joske, *Jeffery & Hoffman, Rottnest*, p. 28; Green, *Far from Home* pp. 72-78

42 The Herald (Fremantle), 28 April 1883, Source: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/110503053>, Accessed October 2020; Joske, *Jeffery & Hoffman, Rottnest*, pp. 75-76; Green, *Far from Home*, p. 295.

43 The other Aboriginal men were Tampin (hanged 16 July 1879), Guerilla (18 June 1883), Naracorie (3 August 1883) and Calabungamarra (13 June 1888).

44 Randolph, P., Wilson, V., Frampton, C. & Merritt, G., 'Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prisoners Cemetery: Delineation of extent using ground penetrating radar', *Archaeology in the North* (1993), pp. 394-415.

45 Green, 'Aborigines and Settlers', pp. 103-05; citing *Parliamentary Debates* 3 August 1883, pp. 92-93

46 TPG, 2015, op cit., p., 25

47 During this period, the non-Aboriginal boys held in the Boy's Reformatory also located on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island also undertook construction and other labour.

48 Considine and Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

management of Fremantle Prison's Comptroller-General, and Rottnest Island was declared a penal station as an annex of Fremantle Prison.<sup>49</sup>

Closure turned the attention of the public and the Government to Wadjemup/Rottnest Island's possibilities as a leisure destination. Prisoners were periodically sent from Fremantle Prison to work in the salt works and the 'beautification' across the island, as well as the construction of temporary prison facilities near Lake Baghdad, and the Salt House.<sup>50</sup> During this period the majority of prisoners were non-Aboriginal and had been transferred from Fremantle Prison for their particular skills in masonry, carpentry or for other specific purposes. Approximately ten percent of the prisoners retained on the island were Aboriginal.

In 1919 the Aboriginal prisoners were transferred to the newly constructed set of buildings beside the salt works, known as the Salt House Prison, while land clearance, quarrying and the relocation of huts to the proposed Reformatory Prison site near Herschel Bay continued. In 1920 prisoners were transferred from Fremantle Gaol, and presumably elsewhere on the island, to the Reformatory Prison site.<sup>51</sup> However by 1922, the Reformatory Prison closed, the majority of the prisoners returned to Fremantle Prison and the site was dismantled. By 1923, Fremantle prisoners worked restricted hours at the island, usually from April to November to avoid the holiday season. Works focused on accommodation maintenance, repairs, firewood collection and roadworks.<sup>52</sup> The last prisoner was returned to Fremantle in November 1931.

The former prison buildings were converted for use as holiday accommodation in 1911. The Quod formed part of the Lodge holiday accommodation, which operated under a private lease until its 2018 closure. This juxtaposition of use has prompted claims that converting the former cells of Aboriginal prisoners to tourist accommodation could be compared to turning Auschwitz into holiday cottages.<sup>53</sup> The Rottnest Island Authority has indicated its intention to convert the buildings and nearby burial ground (cemetery) to a Reconciliation Centre, under a consultative process with the Wadjemup Aboriginal Reference Group.<sup>54</sup>

Between 1838 and 1931, it is officially reported that 369 Aboriginal prisoners died on the island.<sup>55</sup> While most deaths were caused by disease (usually influenza and associated respiratory diseases), at least five prisoners were hanged.<sup>56</sup> K. G. Winder has noted:

It is likely that there were many more deaths than those so far recorded. Records from this period are not complete and no proper register of deaths was kept until after 1883. In addition, seriously ill prisoners were sometimes sent to mainland hospitals and any

---

49 Green, *Far from Home*, pp. 36

50 Comptroller General's Report, 1918; cited Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, pp. 81-82

51 Ibid.

52 Green, *Far from Home*, pp. 43

53 Green, *Far from Home*, pp. 85-86; Limb, Peter, 'Of Deeds Most Foul and Vile: A Short Comparative History of Robben & Rottnest Penal Islands', *African Studies Association of Australasia & the Pacific Review* 20.1 (June 1998), pp. 15-19; 'Rottnest Lodge "Like Auschwitz"', *Subiaco Post* (3 January 1998).

54 TPG *op cit*, pp.82, 93; Rottnest Island Authority, 2018, Source: <http://ria.wa.gov.au/policy-and-reports/sustainability/Social-sustainability/Quod> [Accessed June 2020.]

55 Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Perth, File No. 88/699, 'Deaths of Aborigines in Custody: List of 'Aboriginal Men Who Died At Rottnest Island, 1838-1900' compiled by Howard Pedersen

56 Tampin (hanged 16 July 1879), Wangabiddie (1883), Guerilla (18 June 1883), Naracorie (3 August 1883) and Calabungamarra (13 June 1888).

subsequent deaths would add to the total number of men who died as a result of being sent to Rottnest Island. Others who became ill en route to the prison were sometimes detained by the doctor in Fremantle if he considered them too sick to proceed. The report of the Guardian of Aboriginals in 1856 also points out that prisoners were sometimes dying after their release of 'fatigue and starvation' in their endeavours to return to their own districts.<sup>57</sup>

Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island continues to be a potent symbol for Aboriginal people across Western Australia. Controversy erupted over the discovery in the 1960s and 1970s of skeletons in 'Tentland', an area of the Island set aside for campers but used in the prison period as an Aboriginal burial ground. In 1985, the Aboriginal Sites Department formally recorded the place as a cemetery and marked its approximate location. Three years later, in response to demands by Aboriginal people, a ground penetrating radar survey marked out the cemetery's boundaries. Finally, in 1992, the graves were fenced off and signs erected. However, 'Tentland' was adjacent to the cemetery and members of the Rottnest Island Deaths Group believed the graveyard might still extend into the camping area.<sup>58</sup> In August 2007, the Rottnest Island Authority announced that it would permanently close the Tentland site because investigations showed it sat partly on top of the Aboriginal cemetery.<sup>59</sup>

The brutal treatment of the estimated 3,000 Aboriginal prisoners,<sup>60</sup> the dead of whom lie in unmarked graves,<sup>61</sup> has been depicted in creative works in more recent years, including film, poetry, artwork and song. Aboriginal poet Graeme Dixon evokes the insensitivity of tourists on 'Holocaust Island' who are oblivious of 'skeletons in their cupboards/of deeds most foul and vile'.<sup>62</sup> Sally Morgan's painting, *Rottnest*, depicts holidaymakers frolicking on top of the graves.

The impact of the incarceration of Aboriginal people from across Western Australia at Wadjemup cannot be overstated. The place has considerable importance to the Aboriginal people of Western Australia as the site of exile and often death for Aboriginal men under Colonial law from 1838 to 1931.

## Seafaring

Wadjemup/Rottnest Island was a first sight of land for many travellers arriving in Perth and Fremantle in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or, for those leaving, the last view as they departed. Ships often anchored off the island awaiting a berth or a pilot into Fremantle port.<sup>63</sup>

Rottnest Island Pilot Station operated between 1848 and 1903, staffed by experienced sailors who guided ships around the dangerous reefs and into Fremantle harbour. Over its 55 years of operation, the Pilot Station used a number

<sup>57</sup> Winder, 'Aboriginal Prison', p. 1

<sup>58</sup> Kwaymullina, 'Wadjemup', pp. 117-18; Wilson, V.C., Frampton, C.I., & Randolph, P., 'Location of Burial Sites using Ground-Penetrating Radar Surveys on Rottnest Island, Western Australia', *Technical Program of the Sixty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Society of Exploration Geophysicists*, Los Angeles (1994): pp. 563-65

<sup>59</sup> 'Graveyard forces the closure of Rotto Tentland', *West Australian*, 1 August 2007

<sup>60</sup> *In the Name of the Crow* (1988); *Island of Chains* (1991); *Wadjemup: Isle of Spirits* (1993)

<sup>61</sup> Dodson, P., *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Regional Report into Underlying Issues in Western Australia* (Canberra: AGPS, 1991) p. 18; Green, *Far from Home*, p. 83; Kwaymullina reports 'beer cans and rubbish' in the cemetery and routine vandalism of the protecting fence ('Wadjemup', p. 118)

<sup>62</sup> Dixon, G., *Holocaust Island*, St. Lucia: Univ. Qld. Press, 1990, p. 32; cf. Hasluck, N., 'Rottnest Island' in Zwicky, F., (ed.), *Quarry* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1981)

<sup>63</sup> TPG for RIA, 'Rottnest Island (Wadjemup) Cultural Landscape Management Plan (Draft)', January 2015, p.37

of different boats: a double-ended whaleboat, a slightly larger lugger and a small dinghy. A secure boathouse was established in 1846 for the pilot service at the northern end of the seawall. Six years later, quarters for the pilot crew were added above the boathouse. In 1859 another boathouse (Boatshed and Holding Cell,) was built, which remains extant, and is located north of the Main Jetty.

Lighthouses played a key role in the pilot boat operations by providing a communication link between the pilot boat station and incoming ships. The Island's first lighthouse was completed in 1849 with Aboriginal prisoner labour. Half a century later it was replaced with a new, taller lighthouse on Wadjemup Hill (P3254 *Rottnest Island Light Station* (RHP)). A third was built in 1900 at Bathurst Point (P517 *Bathurst Lighthouse & Quarters* (RHP)) following the loss of 11 lives with the wreck of the *City of York* in 1899. (The anchor from this vessel now stands outside the Accommodation Office on the Island).

Erected close to the original Pilot Station established by 1866,<sup>64</sup> P517 *Bathurst Lighthouse & Quarters* (RHP) is on the north-east cape of the island, north of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. It is a subsidiary light to P3254 *Rottnest Island Light Station* (RHP) in the centre of the island.

### **Boys' Reformatory**

In 1881 the State Government decided Rottnest would be a suitable location to reform colonial boys who had come into conflict with the law. The Rottnest Island Boys' Reformatory was opened in 1881 next to the Aboriginal Prison, and operated for 20 years.

Carpenter John Watson was asked to construct the Boys' Reformatory buildings on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island and these included a workshop, kitchen, two large dormitories, a schoolroom and four small cells. The building complex was constructed with limestone walls, timber floors and a pitched, shingled roof, and incorporated the earlier Catechist building constructed by the Aboriginal prisoners. Upon completion of the building work, Watson decided to stay on as the Reformatory Superintendent and to teach the boys carpentry, joinery and gardening.

In 1890 it was suggested that young female offenders should be sent to the Rottnest Reformatory. This did not happen.

There was an average of six boys in the Reformatory from 1884 to 1897, but complaints in 1894 stated that the building was crowded with neglected children sent over to the island from industrial schools. They, with the juvenile offenders, attended school daily for some hours under Samuel Walcott, the Rottnest schoolmaster. The boys were employed in the workshops, on buildings, in the garden and on the farm. Some of those on vagrancy charges were released for domestic services.

Strong pressure was exerted in the late 1890s to remove non-convicted boys from Rottnest, and by 1902 there were ten institutions in the State to cater for neglected, destitute and delinquent children. The Reformatory closed in September 1901 when the 14 inmates were transferred to the Salvation Army Industrial School at Collie. In 1904, the Reformatory was used for 72 Protestant orphanage girls, and

---

<sup>64</sup> Got, K., *Western Australia's Manned Lighthouses: A Report on the Western Australian Lighthouse Survey*, June 1984, p. 17

since 1909 the buildings have been used as holiday accommodation, operated as part of the Lodge complex of buildings.<sup>65</sup>

### **Governor's Summer Residence (Governor's Residence, Quokka Arms; Rottnest Hotel, Hotel Rottnest)**

In 1848, Governor Fitzgerald expressed an interest in residing on Rottnest, so it became an exclusive summer retreat for successive Governors and their friends. Superintendent Vincent's house (Cottages F and G) was originally used as the Governor's House. However, in 1861 Vincent began work on a purpose-built summer residence for the Governor overlooking Thomson Bay. Located in the south eastern corner of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* and completed in 1864, it was originally named The Governor's Cottage to signify its junior rank to Government House on the mainland. Governors and their families usually spent up to two months each year on the island, bringing over a butler, other servants and carriages. The last official occupant was Sir Gerald Strickland in 1913, after which a 'summer residence' was established at Albany.<sup>66</sup>

In 1915 the building was taken over by the Defence Department, and European prisoners were briefly held there in 1916.<sup>67</sup> When the Rottnest Island Board of Control was established in 1917, marking the beginning of tourism on the Island, the Governor's Residence was converted to accommodation facilities for holidaymakers from the mainland in 1919.<sup>68</sup>

In 1953 the building was converted into the 'Rottnest Hotel', under publican F. R. Mann.<sup>69</sup> In 1966 accommodation rooms and a bistro were constructed, along with staff accommodation. Construction of a large bar and lounge to the north of the Hotel took place in 1971, along with cool room and loading dock. Four new rooms were added to the southern accommodation section in 1992, along with an extension of bistro and of the dining room. Staff quarters were altered and extended, and some new pre-fabricated units added to the south-east corner of the Hotel site. Further extensive alterations were undertaken in 2004, and for a time the hotel was known as the 'Quokka Arms'.<sup>70</sup>

In 2017, Rottnest Island Authority referred the proposed Hotel Rottnest Resort redevelopment to the Heritage Council. The redevelopment comprises 80 new accommodation rooms over two levels, two courtyard pools, a refurbished function facility, a Beach Club, new food and beverage areas, and utility and service areas. The Hotel Rottnest Resort 'Sapphire' opened in November 2020.

The major architectural features of the residence remain a prominent feature of the building, although the outbuildings and stables are no longer extant. The former Government House forecourt area, remnant 19th century garden walls and plantation plantings as well as the former residence, now known as Hotel Rottnest, remain extant and the former use of the building is evident.

---

65 Joske, Jeffery & Hoffman, *Rottnest Island*, pp. 143-51; Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, pp. 56-59, 72-75

66 Source: [www.rottnestisland.com](http://www.rottnestisland.com) [consulted 15 November 2006]

67 Joske, Jeffery & Hoffman, *Rottnest Island*, p. 339

68 Source: [www.rottnestisland.com](http://www.rottnestisland.com) [consulted 15 November 2006]

69 Joske, Jeffery & Hoffman, *Rottnest Island*, p. 339

70 Source: [www.rottnestisland.com](http://www.rottnestisland.com) [consulted 15 November 2006]

## Recreation

In May 1902 the Colonial Secretary, Frederick Illingworth, advised the Premier, George Leake, that there were only 40 prisoners on Rottnest Island. As the cost of running the prison was £2,821 a year, he recommended that the island cease operating as a penal establishment. He further added:

If Rottnest is closed as a penal station I feel sure it would speedily become a satisfactory health resort; & possibly we might dispose of a good portion of the Island for residential purposes; it will of course be for Cabinet to consider how this should be done.<sup>71</sup>

From 1902, ferries carried tourists to Rottnest Island on Sundays. During these times visitors and prisoners were kept well apart. However, little was done regarding proposals to turn the island into a tourist resort until 1905, when the Colonial Secretary requested permission to subdivide the island for private sale. This aroused public protest, and requests were made to the Government to secure the entire island for public use.<sup>72</sup>

The first public jetty was built in 1906 to the south of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* at the site of the former Army Jetty<sup>73</sup>. Until then, passengers and cargo were brought ashore by flat-bottomed barge. A tram track was laid from the jetty to the Settlement and horse drawn trams used to carry visitors and goods. The trams were later replaced by motor vehicles in 1925 and most of the tracks removed and relocated to Perth Zoo. Small portions of the track remain.

In 1907 plans for transforming Wadjemup/Rottnest Island from a prison settlement to a recreation and holiday Island were drawn up by the Colonial Secretary's Department. The Governor, Admiral Frederick George Denham Bedford, wrote a minute for consideration of the cabinet:

1. That the island should be declared a Public Park and recreation ground for ever. It is very desirable to avoid the idea getting about that the island is being exploited for the benefit of a few men who at this time could afford to buy or rent plots and build.
2. That the natural Beauty of this island shall not be disturbed more than is absolutely necessary.
3. Better communication with the mainland.
4. That it should be made more attractive by planting trees and making roads.<sup>74</sup>

As part of this scheme the Bickley Bay area began to be modestly developed for public recreation. Timber and hessian camps, a store and a recreational hall were built overlooking Bickley Bay in the vicinity of where Kingstown Barracks now stand. A number of houses in the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*, formerly used by warders, pilots and other staff, were also made available for the opening season of 1911.

However, with a change of government in 1911, the new Colonial Secretary, John M. Drew, had the Bickley camps closed for lack of sanitation and insecure

71 CSO, Vol. 965, 1902, p. 9

72 Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, p. 77

73 In 2014 a portion of the Army Jetty collapsed, injuring three people. After a safety audit of the jetty, the concrete portions were removed and only the rock groin remains. Source: ABC News, 14 Feb 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-14/rottnest-island-jetty-not-inspected-before-collapse/10811412>, Accessed October 2020.

74 Somerville, *Rottnest Island*, p. 94

foundations. In 1913 it was proposed to shift the camp reserve to the Bathurst side of the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. Thirty weatherboard camp shelters were subsequently rebuilt at the Bathurst end of Thomson Bay.<sup>75</sup> The Quod and Boys' Reformatory were converted to hostel accommodation, known for many years as the Lodge, and were completed in the 1913/14 summer season. The remaining prisoners located on the island had been relocated to temporary facilities away from the holiday-makers.

Attempts were made in the first decade after the prison's closure to landscape the island as a 'paradise garden'. Landscape gardener A.M. Cowan oversaw plantings, with species sourced from P3084 *Hamel Nursery* (RHP). Many of the large surviving trees on the island were planted in either 1907-08 or a second planting campaign, under William Somerville, from 1929 through the 1940s.<sup>76</sup>

In 1917 Rottnest Island was declared an A-Class Reserve (excluding the lighthouses and prison) under the *Parks and Reserves Act* (1895) and the Rottnest Board of Control was formed. More improvements were planned in 1917: a large tearoom and store were erected near the main jetty and wooden bungalows were also constructed close by and on the north side of the jetty. The original limestone buildings in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/Rottnest Island* were whitewashed and this created extreme glare. To remove the glare, buildings were progressively painted with an ochre colour that was created by adding rusty nails to the whitewash paint.<sup>77</sup>

## **Military Operations**

### *World War I*

World War I was declared on 4 August 1914 and ten days later the Defence Department commandeered Rottnest Island for use as an Internment Camp for the detention of 'enemy aliens'. Approximately 700 men of Serbian, Croatian and Dalmatian background were held in the Rottnest Camp located in the north of the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/Rottnest Island* area during 1915, before they were transferred to New South Wales in November.<sup>78</sup> Several buildings were damaged during this period, and the Federal Government paid £2,000 in compensation. With this money, work on new holiday accommodation commenced and several timber bungalows were erected in the former camp area.<sup>79</sup>

### *Inter war Period*

By this time, Government House had been converted into flats, and the Boys' Reformatory developed as a hostel (Lodge). The stone cottages were let to tourists, with the first Superintendent's cottage divided into two flats (F & G), the old Military Barracks into three flats (E, J & H), and the Quod into a hostel and four flats (A, B, C & D). The Board of Control continued to utilise prison labour in construction

---

75 Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, p. 78

76 TPG op cit., pp.49-50

77 Rottnest Island Authority, Source: <https://rotnnestisland.com/the-island/about-the-island/our-history/recreational>, Accessed November 2020.

78 Between 1914 and 1926, and again between 1939 and 1971, all immigrants or 'aliens' to Australia who were not British subjects were required to register with authorities following the outbreak of war. Aliens were classified according to their nationality in the following categories: Allied, Neutral, Indeterminate and Enemy. Source: National Archives of Australia, <http://www.naa.gov.au>, Accessed August 2020.

79 Considine and Griffiths, op cit., p. 31; TPG 2015, op cit, p. 79

and other works during this period to supplement the income generated by tourism industry.

William Somerville became a member of the Rottnest Island Board in 1929 and immediately began planting and trialling exotic trees to reforest the island, and establishing a nursery in 1932. Within the Thomson Bay area, Somerville planted Tuarts (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*), and Canary Island date palms along the Thomson Bay foreshore. A series of avenues including the use of Peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*) were proposed and planted from the Governor's Residence, hostels and toward the Basin. Somerville continued his planting campaign well into the 1940s.<sup>80</sup>

A stone and timber cairn and lookout, 'Vlamingh Memorial', originally intended to be constructed on Cape Vlamingh, was constructed on View Hill in 1935 to the design by the Rottnest Island Board of Control's Honorary Architect Member, Edgar le B. Henderson.<sup>81</sup>

### World War II

During the 1930s, in response to the deteriorating situation in Europe the Australian Military Board began machinations to improve Australia's coastal defences. Rottnest Island was identified as an ideal site for the installation of fortification works to protect the Port of Fremantle.<sup>82</sup> Major construction works commenced on Rottnest in 1935 and the narrow gauge railway to connect the Army Jetty with P525 *Kingstown Barracks* (RHP), Bickley Battery and P526 *Oliver Hill Battery, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* (RHP) was completed in April 1936.<sup>83</sup> The majority of works occurred to the south and west of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*, in accordance with the Prime Minister's statement to the Western Australian Premier:

I desire to inform you that it is proposed to proceed in the near future with certain important fortification works on Rottnest Island for the protection of the Port of Fremantle. When the plans are further advanced you will be advised in greater detail, especially as to the areas of land which will be used for barrack and armament sites. In the meantime it may be assumed that the work to be undertaken will not only not cause any detriment to the island as a holiday resort, but will add considerably to its interest in this respect.<sup>84</sup>

However, on 3 September 1939 Australia and its allies entered World War II and by June 1940 Rottnest Island was declared a prohibited area and all recreational activity ceased.<sup>85</sup> Buildings in *Thomson Bay Settlement Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* were also converted for military use and activities.<sup>86</sup>

In late 1942 the strength of the military on Rottnest Island peaked at 2,500, including Army, RAN, RAAF, AWAS and WRAAAF personnel. The RAN personnel included WRANS who operated the PWSS and were housed at WRANS House near P3254 *Rottnest Island Light Station* (RHP). As well as manning their radar

---

80 Considine and Griffiths, op cit., p. 35; TPG 2015, op cit., p. 50

81 Considine and Griffiths, op cit., p. 35.

82 cited Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, p. 95

83 NAA: MP729/6, File No. 23/406/65

84 cited Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, p. 95

85 *West Australian*, 11 September 1940

86 Considine and Griffiths, op cit., p. 38.

station at Stark Bay. RAAF personnel provided meteorological services for the batteries at Bickley and Oliver Hill. The AWAS personnel who operated the plotting rooms at P526 *Oliver Hill Battery, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* (RHP) were housed in barracks located near the guns. The majority of remaining personnel were located in barracks in or near P525 *Kingstown Barracks* (RHP).

Towards the end of the war, the majority of the military personnel on Rottnest Island were either transferred to other Units or demobilised. By April 1945 the military had vacated *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. However, the Rottnest Island Board refused to take back the island until the Army agreed to restore facilities to their pre-war order. By December, tourists were once again visiting Wadjemup /Rottnest Island.<sup>87</sup>

### **Holiday Playground**

Recreational and holiday pursuits have continued on Wadjemup/Rottnest Island from 1902 to the present day except for its closure during the World Wars for military functions and during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to holiday makers, there were many permanent residents associated with the recreational use of the island, including those managing accommodation, publicans, priests, police and teachers.

Timber bungalows continued to be built as holiday accommodation until the first brick cottage was constructed at the northern end of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* in 1960. By 1966, eleven more brick cottages and eight brick flats were completed south of the hotel, and a further eight cottages and eight flats were completed on Bathurst Point in 1972. A hospital was opened in 1960, a bowling green and primary school in 1963, and a new administration building in 1964. The Salt Store was converted for use by the island engineer and ranger. In 1965, a new building was constructed for the Totalisator Agency Board (TAB), and twelve motel-style units were constructed in 1967.

By 1971, *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* contained 102 cottages, bungalows and flats. A police station was built in 1972 and a Roman Catholic Church in 1975. Development also commenced in 1976 in Longreach Bay, and in Geordie Bay in 1978. In 1983, the Lodge (fmr Boy's Reformatory) was expanded to provide additional serviced accommodation. A new hospital and a new bakery were constructed in 1984, with an airport building in 1985.<sup>88</sup>

In the twenty-first century, Australians have begun moving away from long summer beach holidays. International travel is now accessible to many. Holidays are generally shorter than in the past, and holiday makers often expect more facilities and higher standards of accommodation. Special-interest tourism is also on the rise, with eco-tourism, heritage tourism and an increasing interest in Aboriginal history all particularly relevant emerging holiday trends.<sup>89</sup> The Rottnest Island

---

87 Joske, Jeffery & Hoffman, *Rottnest Island*, p. 277

88 Ferguson, *Rottnest Island*, pp. 89-90

89 Matt Wade & Melanie Kembrey, 'Why Australia's holiday habits have changed forever', in *Canberra Times* (online), 9 January 2015, <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/life-style/current-affairs/why-australias-holiday-habits-have-changed-forever-20141215-11yc62.html> accessed 4 May 2015; Jim Davidson & Peter Spearritt, 'Tourism, Postmodernism and Australia', in *Australian Humanities Review* (online) <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-February-2001/davidsonspearritt.html> accessed 4 May 2015

Authority continues to upgrade facilities and develop Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island in response to these changes. Visitors have long been charmed by the presence of quokkas on the island. The quokka is the only mammal that is native to Wadjemup and one of the most popular. Previously hunted for food, in the late 1920s the quokka population was protected and began to soar. The 'quokka selfie' has become a popular tourist activity on the island, triggered by a 'viral' photo in 2012, the advent of smart phones and its subsequent embrace by several celebrities and influencers. Selfies with quokkas are not discouraged, although visitors are asked to not touch or feed the mammals. The quokka is increasingly utilised in tourism marketing for the island.

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020. On the 15 March 2020, the Minister for Emergency Services and the Western Australian State Government declared a State of Emergency under the *Emergency Management Act 2005* in response to COVID-19.<sup>90</sup> On the 25 March 2020, the State Emergency Coordinator issued the Rottnest Island Closure Directions under the *Emergency Management Act 2005*. From that time, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island was utilised by the Western Australian State Government for use as a quarantine island to restrict the potential spread of the COVID-19 virus from visitors entering the state, originally via cruise vessels. Australians returning to Western Australia via air travel were placed in accommodation facilities across the island, including *Thomson Bay Settlement*, as a quarantine measure.<sup>91</sup> Access to the island by the public remained restricted until June 2020, at which point recreation activities recommenced. The State government advised that the island may be returned to quarantine use as required.<sup>92</sup>

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* comprises buildings, roads, paths, walls, engineering structures, plantings and archaeological sites associated with the pre-colonial Aboriginal use of the island, colonial farming practices, the operation of the Aboriginal prison, the workings of the salt works, the internment camp, and military occupation on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island.

The following is intended as a summary of the cultural heritage of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*. It does not attempt to describe every building in the precinct.

Further information can be found in the following documents:

- Thomson Bay Settlement, Rottnest Island Conservation Plan, 1994 prepared for Rottnest Island Authority by Considine and Griffiths,
- Rottnest Island/Wadjemup Cultural Landscape Management Plan, May 2015, prepared for Rottnest Island Authority by TPG.

---

<sup>90</sup> Rolling extensions to the declaration first came into effect on 23 March 2020 State of Western Australia. Source: <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/covid-19-coronavirus-state-of-emergency-declarations>, Accessed 3 April 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Hotels in the metropolitan area, as well as self-quarantine options in private residences, were also utilised

<sup>92</sup> Rottnest Island Authority, 2020. Source: <https://rotnnestisland.com/COVID-19/Closure%20Directions>, Accessed 26 March 2020.

## Environment

*Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* comprises six major habitats: coastal, salt lakes, brackish swamps, woodlands, heath and settled areas. Salt lakes occupy ten per cent of the area of the island. Prior to colonial settlement in 1831, over half of the Island was covered in large areas of woodland. It has been estimated that native forest, which now covers only 5% of the Island, once occupied 65%. The original vegetation, now largely destroyed for farming, construction and for firewood, consisted of forests of Rottnest Island Pine (*Callitris preissii*), wattle (*Acacia rostellifera*) and Rottnest Island Tea Tree (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) and areas of open heath. Scattered relic stands of woodland are still present across Wadjemup, however some portions of the island are highly modified due to human impact and on-going development. Urban development is particularly evident in the three main settlement areas: Thomson Bay Settlement, Geordie Bay settlement and the Kingstown Barracks.<sup>93</sup>

The curtilage of *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is characterised by the main settlement area, bordered by a sandy beach strip, coastal limestone formations and undulating dune formations to the east and the eastern portion of Garden Lake to the west.

Many introduced (non-native) plant species that grow in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* and along the roads and pathways, including plantings of Norfolk Island pine, Moreton Bay fig, Port Jackson fig, Date palms, Aleppo pines, Tuart, Olive and Peppermint, and weeds such as onion weeds (*Asphodelus fistulosus* and *Trachyantra divaricata*).<sup>94</sup>

An A-class reserve, *Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is habitat to a range of terrestrial and marine wildlife. A number of reptiles, birds and mammals can be found in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island*, including skinks (*Egernia kingie*), bobtails (*Tiliqua rugose konowi*) and snakes, Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), Rainbow bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*) and the quokka (*Setonix brachyurus*), the only mammal that is native to Wadjemup.<sup>95</sup>

## Built environment

- Sea Walls, 1842: Battered limestone mass retaining walls, approximately 3.3m high, raised in height after 1970. Copperas washed and painted. All stone steps replaced by either granite or brick. Distinctive overall irregular form denotes gradual development and unifying effect as part of waterfront group of places.

The Sea Wall is in good condition and requires regular limewash. Major restoration works were completed in 2018 including root control and installation of root barrier; grout injection behind the limestone wall to create

<sup>93</sup> Bindon, Dortch, & Kendrick, 'Pseudo shell midden', pp. 162-71; Rottnest Island Authority, *Rottnest Island Wildlife*, Source: <https://wildlife.rotnnestisland.com/land/habitats/settlement>, Accessed October 2020; TPG for RIA, 'Rottnest Island (Wadjemup) Cultural Landscape Management Plan', May 2015, pp.11-14.

<sup>94</sup> Rottnest Island Authority, *Rottnest Island Wildlife*. Source: <https://wildlife.rotnnestisland.com/land/habitats/settlement>; Rottnest Society, 2011, Grow Your Own Rottnest, Source: [http://www.rotnnestsociety.org.au/archives/grow\\_your\\_own\\_rotnnest.htm](http://www.rotnnestsociety.org.au/archives/grow_your_own_rotnnest.htm), Accessed October 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Rottnest Island Authority, *Rottnest Island Wildlife*. Source: <https://wildlife.rotnnestisland.com/land/habitats/settlement>, Accessed October 2020.

a mass retaining wall behind; and repair, removal of cement mortars, repointing with lime, and limewash.<sup>96</sup>

- Superintendent's Residence (fmr) (Cottages F & G), 1842: Ashlar stone blocks, limewashed, later rendered over and painted. Roof has some original parapets removed to allow simply framed corrugated fibro cement replacements. Circular kitchen. Changes include reconstruction after 1855 fire, modifications to suit Governor's use, modifications for rental and to allow shops to be built to the rear. Infilling of balustrade to the front.

The Former Superintendent's Residence (Cottages F & G) underwent conservation works in 2018 and were at that time in good condition.<sup>97</sup>

- Military Barracks (fmr) (Cottages E, J & H), 1844: Ashlar stone, plastered and painted. Replacement roof revealing a previous shingle one. Legible record of the evolution of the building is apparent in east façade. Unusual fireplaces. Substantial additions to the north, and major modifications to roofs.

In 2018, Cottages E, H & J were in poor to fair condition, with problems relating to limestone fabric; inappropriate cement renders and acrylic paint inside and out; and drainage issues associated with downpipes and soakwells.<sup>98</sup>

- Boathouse & Crew's Quarters (fmr) (Board Cottage), 1846: Predominantly ashlar stone, limewashed and painted. Some rendered and painted brickwork. Roof is corrugated fibro cement. Old Crew's Quarters divided into four separate rooms with stud-framed partitions.

In 2018, Boathouse and Crew's Quarters (Board Cottage) were in poor to fair condition, with problems relating to limestone fabric; inappropriate cement renders and acrylic paint inside and out; and drainage issues associated with downpipes and soakwells.<sup>99</sup>

- Pilot's Quarters (fmr) (Cottages K1 & K2) 1847: Stone (probably ashlar) limewashed and painted. Pitched corrugated galvanised steel roof over shingle predecessor. Has unusual fireplace. Major additions to north.

In 2018, Cottages K1 & K2 were in poor to fair condition, with problems relating to limestone fabric; inappropriate cement renders and acrylic paint inside and out; and drainage issues associated with downpipes and soakwells.<sup>100</sup>

- Second Superintendent's Quarters (fmr) (Manager's Residence), 1850: Ashlar stone, limewashed and painted. Roof is replacement corrugated galvanised steel. Some remaining windows with drawn glass and visible evidence of previous roof. Kitchen, scullery and laundry extensions to the south, and timber flooring has been removed from verandahs.

---

<sup>96</sup> Condition update information from Annabel Wills, former Heritage Officer, Rottnest Island Authority, pers comm to Melissa Davis, Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, October 2020.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

In 2018, the Manager's Residence was in poor to fair condition, with problems relating to limestone fabric; inappropriate cement renders and acrylic paint inside and out; and drainage issues associated with downpipes and soakwells.<sup>101</sup>

- Former Mill and Hay Store (Barn (fmr); now Museum), 1855: Ashlar stone with corbelled gables and buttress to north elevation. Roof is replacement galvanised corrugated steel. Has central threshing or milling area. Restructuring of roof, insertion then removal of rooms for hostel staff accommodation, removal of several openings, replacement of some joinery, and addition of large buttress to north end.

The Museum was in good condition in 2018, with drainage works carried out c. 2018.<sup>102</sup>

- Cell Block, Cattle Shed & Stables (fmr) (General Store, also known as Shopping Mall), 1855: Ashlar and random rubble stone, limewashed and painted with brick quoins to openings, louvred gables. Roof is replacement galvanised steel. Has remnant fire place and hatch at north end of interior. Many rearrangements of interiors, verandahs added and construction of new bakery to north end.

Major works were carried out between 1998 and 2000 and the place was in fair condition in 2018.<sup>103</sup>

- Chapel & School, 1856: Ashlar stone rendered and painted. Split beam truss, boarded soffit and galvanised corrugated steel roof. Traces of a fireplace on the north wall.

Major works were carried out between 1998 and 2000 and the place was in fair condition in 2018.<sup>104</sup>

- Boatshed and Holding Cell, 1859: Ashlar limestone blocks, limewashed and painted, unpainted internally. Main roof is split beam and board with concrete roofing. Cell roof is board, corrugated iron and concrete. Sentry box roof is corrugated iron.

Major works were carried out on the Boatshed between 1998 and 2000 and the place was in fair condition. In 2018, the Holding Cell was in poor condition and required repair.<sup>105</sup>

- Hotel Rottnest (fmr Governor's Residence), 1864: Rendered and painted ashlar stone, some crenellated parapets, later rendered brick and fibro cement walls. Roof is colorbond custom orb replacing earlier format. Castle based illusions in plan, crenellated parapets. Fragments of surrounding garden walls to north, east and south. Modifications to almost all rooms, including the construction and removal of a billiard room. Additions of bars, restaurant (now removed), motel units and outdoor bar have obscured the original composition.

---

101 *ibid.*

102 *ibid.*

103 *ibid.*

104 *ibid.*

105 *ibid.*

Hotel Rottnest (former Governor's Residence) is in fair to good condition. The wall at the perimeter of the beer garden is in poor to fair condition, and may require stabilisation works associated with the encroaching trees.<sup>106</sup>

- The Quod, 1864: Octagonal plan with walls of varying height made of smooth ashlar stone, mainly painted.

Adaptation of the place for tourist accommodation in c.1911 included construction of timber pavilion, subsequently known as the 'harem' at the centre of the courtyard (over the old well).<sup>107</sup> Other additions include decorative portcullis, unusual fireplaces. Much adaptive work to achieve present accommodation. Walls removed to achieve bathrooms and larger bedrooms. Courtyard has changed from large open space to one focused on the 'harem'.

The Quod has been vacant since the 2018 cessation of the Lodge lease and is in poor condition.<sup>108</sup>

- Salt Store (fmr), 1867: Limestone ashlar, rendered and painted, with majority of west wall being excavated rock. Roof is split beam trusses, boarding and concrete with corrugated iron. Interior walls are panelled and the bank counter, though modified remains, as does a safe in an old fireplace.

The Salt Store was in poor condition in 2018, with issues associated with damp and soil deposition to the rear of the building. The random rubble at the rear of the Salt Store also required repair.<sup>109</sup>

- Pilot's Crew's Kitchen (fmr) (Cottage M), 1867: Stone walls, limewashed and painted, weatherboard additions and rendered brick additions to rear. Corrugated galvanised steel roof. Has substantial chimney.

In 2018, Cottage M was in poor to fair condition, with problems relating to limestone fabric; inappropriate cement renders and acrylic paint inside and out; and drainage issues associated with downpipes and soakwells.<sup>110</sup>

- Lomas Cottage, 1871: Original cottage, stone lightly rendered over and painted, later fibro-clad studwork. Roof is galvanised corrugated steel over remnant shingles. Large chimney to west end. Framed and boarded east end replacing former stone wall. Addition of rooms to the north, modifications to eastern stone wall, re-roofing, insertion of modern conveniences.

In 2018, Lomas Cottage was in poor to fair condition, with problems relating to limestone fabric; inappropriate cement renders and acrylic paint inside and out; and drainage issues associated with downpipes and soakwells.<sup>111</sup>

---

106 *ibid.*

107 Annette Green (Rottnest Island Authority), December 2017, Assessment of the Harem, Former Aboriginal Prison, Rottnest Island, p. 1.

108 Condition update information from Annabel Wills, former Heritage Officer, Rottnest Island Authority, personal email communication to Melissa Davis, Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, October 2020.

109 *ibid.*

110 *ibid.*

111 *ibid.*

- Assistant Pilot's Crew's Quarters (fmr), (Cottage L), 1871: Stone rendered with incised joints. Corrugated galvanised steel roof over shingles. Has ceiling rose, one of the few on the island. Additions to south, and a door to the east.  
In 2018, Cottage L was in poor to fair condition, with problems relating to limestone fabric; inappropriate cement renders and acrylic paint inside and out; and drainage issues associated with downpipes and soakwells.<sup>112</sup>
- Hospital and Laundry (fmr) (Staff Amenities at the Lodge), 1884: Smooth plastered limestone, limewashed. Roof is galvanised corrugated steel.  
The building has been vacant since the 2018 cessation of the Lodge lease and is in poor condition.<sup>113</sup>
- Boys' Reformatory (fmr) (The Lodge), 1881: Reformatory is thought to have been based on an existing house. Smooth and rough rendered and painted ashlar limestone and brick. Major adaptation and extensions for conversion were carried out in the 1980s affecting most finishes, obscuring the view from the east and encroaching on the Chapel.
- Leading Hand Pilot's Quarters /School House & Quarters (fmr) (Staff Quarters), 1890: Walls are predominantly weatherboard, with painted stone and fibro. Roof is corrugated galvanised steel. Has two modified lantern vents to ridge and unusual fireplace in kitchen.
- Large Timber Bungalows 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 & 30, c.1920: There are minor variations to each bungalow but they are essentially the same core plan. Vertical lattice and 'v' crimp metal on stud framing and weatherboard to core building. Some brick and fibro cement variants. Corrugated galvanised steel roofs.  
The bungalows have recently undergone a significant upgrade and now have their own bathroom, new floorings, new furniture and a new kitchen.
- Small Timber Bungalows 7, 9, 15, 17, 19, 32, 33, 35 & 36, c.1920: These vary in detail, but are essentially very similar. Weatherboard walls and dados on timber stud framing with vertical lattice over. Corrugated galvanised steel roof.  
The bungalows have recently undergone a significant upgrade and now have their own bathroom, new floorings, new furniture and a new kitchen.
- Vlamingh Memorial, 1935: Designed by Edgar le B. Henderson. Two walls (north and south) and four piers in random rubble limestone set in mortar. Bronze plaques commemorate Willem de Vlamingh's visit on 30 December 1696, and record the memorial's unveiling on 30 December 1935. Concrete roof replaced by timber pergola. The Vlamingh Memorial is in good condition.
- Electrical Engineer's Workshop (fmr) (Picture Hall) 1945: Painted corrugated fibro cement on timber stud framing. Corrugated fibro cement

---

112 ibid.

113 ibid.

roof in purlins over two different kinds of roof trusses. Contains a Pathé Frères Magic Lantern and remaining metal-framed seating.

- Units are situated back from the beach in the Thomson Bay Settlement. Some of the Thomson Bay units have been refurbished. Some un-refurbished basic units are located in Thomson Bay South.

### **Other features**

There are two cemeteries on the island. A European and Australia Cemetery known as Rottneest Island Cemetery or Settlement Cemetery is located south of Garden Lake. It is estimated that between 1838 and 1931 at least 369 Aboriginal prisoners died and were buried in unmarked graves, in what is now known as the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground.<sup>114</sup> The site was only recognised by non-Aboriginal island users in recent years, and was previously used as a campground.<sup>115</sup> The Wadjemup Aboriginal Reference Group has been appointed by the Rottneest Island Authority to advise and work on a project to protect and recognise the site.<sup>116</sup>

The Allison Camping Area is located in *Thomson Bay Settlement*, just south of the Museum, and has been a major camping site on the Island for over 50 years. The area is partly shaded by tall Tuart trees and has ablutions on site.

### **Archaeology**

Wadjemup/ Rottneest Island comprises a complex archaeological landscape which encompasses terrestrial and maritime evidence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal occupation and activities across the island.

Archaeological evidence of Aboriginal occupation of the island prior to the sea level rise that split the island from the mainland has been identified in the sea cliffs near Little Armstrong Bay and Bathurst Point.<sup>117</sup> In addition to known Aboriginal sites, including those recorded under the provisions of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*, the place has continuing spiritual and cultural significance to the Whadjuk Noongar people and to other Aboriginal people who are connected from across Western Australia by songlines that coalesce on the island. Further archaeological investigations and research suggest that more stone artefacts relating to the occupation of the island prior to its separation are likely to be located in the area of the salt lakes.<sup>118</sup>

It is likely that there are considerable archaeological deposits and low to moderate artefact scatters dating from colonial settlement to the present across the island and specifically within *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottneest Island*. Ruins, garden features, shafts and tunnels have been identified within the curtilage of the place. Some of these features have the potential, through archaeological

---

114 Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Perth, File No. 88/699, 'Deaths of Aborigines in Custody: List of 'Aboriginal Men Who Died At Rottneest Island, 1838-1900' compiled by Howard Pedersen

115 It was unrecorded on the 1988 Department of Land Information map of Rottneest.

116 TPG for RIA, 'Rottneest Island (Wadjemup) Cultural Landscape Management Plan (Draft)', January 2015, pp.82&93; <http://ria.wa.gov.au/policy-and-reports/sustainability/Social-sustainability/Quod> [accessed 8 June 2020.]

117 Joe Dortch & Charles Dortch (2019) Late Quaternary Aboriginal hunter-gatherer occupation of the Greater Swan Region, south-western Australia, *Australian Archaeology*, 85:1, 15-29

118 TPG for RIA, 'Rottneest Island (Wadjemup) Cultural Landscape Management Plan', May 2015, pp.9-10

investigation to reveal further information regarding colonial farming, the operation of the Aboriginal prison and reformatories, the workings of the salt works, the internment camp and military occupation of the island. The long-term use of the island as a holiday destination is also likely to be discernible from the archaeological record.

### 13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

#### Principal Australian Historic Theme(s)

- 2.1 Living as Australia's earliest inhabitants
- 2.6.1 Displacing Indigenous people
- 3.1 Exploring the coastline
- 3.3 Surveying the continent
- 3.2.2 Lodging people
- 3.2.3 Catering for tourists
- 5.7 Surviving as Indigenous people in a white-dominated society
- 7.6.4 Dispensing justice
- 7.6.5 Incarcerating people
- 7.6.7 Enforcing discriminatory legislation
- 7.6.10 Conserving fragile environments
- 7.6.12 Conserving Australia's heritage
- 8.3 Going on holiday
- 8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests
- 9.7.3 Remembering the dead

#### Heritage Council of Western Australia Theme(s)

- 102 Aboriginal occupation
- 103 Racial contact and interaction
- 104 Land allocation and subdivision
- 106 Workers (including Aboriginal, convict)
- 107 Settlement
- 108 Government policy
- 109 Environmental change
- 201 River and sea transport
- 303 Mining (including mineral processing)
- 311 Hospitality industry and tourism
- 403 Law and order
- 405 Sport, recreation and entertainment
- 501 World Wars and other wars
- 506 Tourism
- 601 Aboriginal people
- 602 Early settlers

#### Comparative Analysis

##### Building styles

The Conservation Plan for *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottneest Island* notes that the style of construction reflects the majority of early building types in Western Australia which were

Simple English rural prototypes with few concessions to their environment, while adapting to the extent that made use of locally won materials. The style was a Georgian derivative, which is evidence in window and door proportions and simple plans with walls of ashlar stone and sparse decoration. In Rottnest's case, the types were touched by Vincent's association with Reveley and his South African experience.<sup>119</sup>

the various early building types reflect European models with few concessions to Rottnest's climate; many were subsequently the subject of adaptive works to address these shortcomings...[including] The addition of verandahs and the drastic modification of roof forms.<sup>120</sup>

The lack of timber on the island led to the development of a distinctive and unusual roof structure for many of the colonial buildings in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* including the Governor's Residence. These roofs, which are still extant on the Superintendent's and Officers' Quarters, Mill and Hay Store, Salt Store, Chapel and Boathouse, used narrowly spaced split beam trusses. The methods of construction used in the roof systems of the cottages are rare in Western Australia, with the use of what are now referred to as 'Vincent's Trusses', stone, and oils for protection against the weather. These methods, constructed under the direction of Vincent, utilised local materials, and were used at a time when roofs were largely made of rushes or shingles cut from sheoak. This was then covered with a slurry of lime and sand thus successfully using the limited resources available on the Island to achieve weather protection for the limestone buildings.

In addition to the buildings on Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island, a search of the Historic Heritage database returns one other building associated with Henry Vincent and his construction legacy.

- P4588 *The Tannery (fmr)* (RHP): a single storey c.1854 limestone building one of a small number of buildings remaining that have been attributed to the building style of Henry Vincent, influenced by Henry Willey Reveley reflecting a competently designed and built, almost utilitarian, example of the Victorian Georgian style that incorporates Mediterranean flat-roof architecture.

### **Aboriginal Prisons**

The Quod in the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is believed to be the only purpose-built Aboriginal prison in Australia. However, the definition of 'prison' is somewhat fluid, especially in the colonial period. Other places, particularly islands, are known to have been used to detain Aboriginal people who had not been charged with any offence.

In Tasmania, Aboriginal people in the invasion, settlement and convict periods were sent to various islands and forced to live in terrible conditions in Swan Island, Gun Carriage Island and, on the West Coast, the penal colony on Sarah Island, in Macquarie Harbour. From 1834, Aboriginal people from all over Tasmania were forcibly removed to the 'Aboriginal Settlement' of Wybalenna, on Flinders Island, Bass Strait, including those who had been held on Swan, Gun Carriage and Sarah Islands. Conditions were harsh and several hundred people are believed to have

---

119 Considine and Griffiths, op cit., p. 51

120 Considine and Griffiths, op cit., p. 68

died at Wybalenna before its closure in 1847, when the last 47 surviving residents were removed to Oyster Cove, south of Hobart. Oyster Cove had previously been a convict station, deemed unfit for human habitation, but was considered suitable for Aboriginal residents.<sup>121</sup>

In the convict period in the eastern colonies, some Aboriginal offenders were transported between convict establishments and imprisoned along with European convicts.<sup>122</sup>

In Victoria, one wing of Pentridge Prison (F Division) exclusively housed Aboriginal inmates for some time, and it is likely that other States also had sections of prisons dedicated for Aboriginal use. However no purpose-built Aboriginal prisons are known to have existed in Victoria, New South Wales, Northern Territory or South Australia.<sup>123</sup>

In Queensland, Palm Island was used as a place of forced resettlement for Aboriginal people from across Queensland. Palm Island residents could also be arrested and imprisoned on the island, or exiled to nearby Eclipse Island.<sup>124</sup> Sufferers of leprosy or venereal disease were sent to Fantome Island, within the Palm Island group, where they were detained. Neither the Heritage Branch of the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection nor Queensland historian Thom Blake are aware of any purpose-built Aboriginal prisons in the State.<sup>125</sup>

Lazarettos and Lock hospitals were also established around Australia in the early part of the twentieth century and used for Aboriginal sufferers of leprosy and venereal disease. Aboriginal people were rounded up and forcibly removed to these institutions, which were often located on islands. In Western Australia, these were at Dorre and Bernier Islands, then relocated onshore to Port Hedland and Derby. Fantome Island in Queensland and Channel Island off Darwin are other examples. Although technically hospitals, the involuntary nature of these institutions gives them some similarities to prisons.

There were many other sites of forced resettlement of Aboriginal people, often run in regimented styles as if prisons, but those interned at hospitals, reserves and other institutions had not been convicted of any crime.

- 
- 121 Glenn Shaw, 'Wybalenna', in University of Tasmania (ed), *the companion to Tasmanian History (online)*, [http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/W/Wybalenna.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/W/Wybalenna.htm); Parks & Wildlife Service Tasmania, 'Sarah Island – History', at <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=7597> accessed 7 May 2015; Luana Toney, Executive Assistant, Office of Aboriginal Affairs Tasmania, email to Clare Menck, 6 May 2015
- 122 Kristyn Harman, University of Tasmania, 'The Same Measure of Justice': Aboriginal Convicts in the Australian Penal Colonies', <http://www.nla.gov.au/ojs/index.php/australian-studies/article/viewFile/1559/1866> accessed 7 May 2015
- 123 Vicki Vaskos, Heritage Reform Officer, Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, email to Clare Menck, 6 May 2015. Ms Vaskos also confirmed that no purpose-built Aboriginal prisons were known in Victoria; Debbie Liddle, Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (NT), email to Clare Menck, 8 May 2015; Maria Derrington, Department of Correctional Services (NT), email to Clare Menck, 8 May 2015; Dianne Bensley, NT Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment – Heritage Branch, email to Clare Menck 11 May 2015; Mario Russo, Built Asset Manager, National Trust SA, email to Clare Menck, 14 May 2015
- 124 Queensland Government, 'Palm Island', at <https://www.qld.gov.au/atsi/cultural-awareness-heritage-arts/community-histories-palm-island/> accessed 7 May 2015
- 125 Thom Blake, email to Clare Menck, 18 May 2015; Catherine Chambers, Principal Heritage Officer, Heritage Branch, Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, email to Clare Menck, 8 May 2015

It is likely that small gaols existed within or near to many Aboriginal communities across Australia that were primarily used to detain Aboriginal prisoners because that was who lived nearby, without being specifically constructed as Aboriginal facilities. The prison facilities at *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* differs from these gaols as it had no local Aboriginal community but received Aboriginal prisoners from all over the State. The local gaols at Palm Island or Wybalenna have some similarity, as the 'local' Aboriginal community at both these places comprised residents forcibly gathered from a much wider area.

The construction of the Quod was deliberately based on the construction of the Round House at Fremantle Prison, P896 *Round House and Arthur Head Reserve* (RHP) which is listed on the State Register of Heritage Places. P1014 *Fremantle Prison* (RHP) is also listed on State Register and joins ten other Australian convict sites listed as part of a serial nomination under the theme of Convictism - Forced Migration on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

### **Governors' Summer Retreats**

Designed in the Victorian Tudor architectural style, the Governor's Residence is the most impressive building on the Island, with its two-storey verandahs (added in 1878) and its crenelated parapets, forming a distinctive landmark on Thomson Bay. The last official occupant was Sir Gerald Strickland in 1913, when a substantial house overlooking King George Sound in Albany was purchased for use by the next three successive governors.<sup>126</sup>

A standard part of the British colonies was a summer retreat for the governor and other senior members of the administration. All the Australian colonies established such retreats. Nineteenth century examples in other States include:

- Hillview, in the NSW southern highlands: An earlier home was purchased and renovated for use as a governor's retreat from 1884 to 1957. The residence is on the NSW State Heritage Register and currently being converted to a hotel.
- Governor's Summer Residence, Belair, SA: This 1860 single-storey Georgian-style stone building served as governor's residence until 1880, when a larger home replaced it. The 1880 residence was destroyed by bushfires in 1955, but the early building remains.

In Western Australia, the governor's summer residence was relocated to Albany once Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island became popular as a holiday destination for ordinary citizens.

The large 1882 residence P00028 *The Rocks* (RHP) was purchased in 1913 and used by three governors before being turned to a variety of government and community uses, including hospital and boarding school. It is now a privately owned hotel.

### **Holiday Islands**

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is the main destination for visitors to Wadjemup /Rottnest Island. Australia's beach holiday culture has led to

---

<sup>126</sup> TPG for RIA, 'Rottnest Island (Wadjemup) Cultural Landscape Management Plan', May 2015, p. 32.

development of many of the islands located relatively close to major cities being developed as holiday destinations. For Melbourne, this is Philip Island, for Hobart both Maria and Bruny Islands, for Brisbane Fraser Island and Stradbroke, Moreton and Bribie Islands in Moreton Bay, for Adelaide Kangaroo Island, and for Sydney numerous small islands within Port Jackson as well as in the waterways heading north. Further information is provided for four of these that have some similarities with Wadjemup /Rottnest Island:

#### *Bruny Island, Tasmania*

Substantially comprising national park, this island is 2.8km offshore and 33kms from Hobart. It was occupied by Aboriginal people at the time of European settlement and has a history of forestry, sealing, whaling, fishing, fruit growing and farming of sheep and cattle. The island has long been used as a holiday destination, largely utilising informal shacks, but increasingly through more formal accommodation. It is accessed by a regular car ferry and is approximately 100km long, although mostly quite narrow.

#### *Phillip Island, Victoria*

Only 1km offshore, this island has been connected to the mainland by a vehicle bridge. It is about 120km from Melbourne and seems over three million visitors a year. In the nineteenth century, Europeans cleared the island for pastoral use and it continues to be a residential and farming area, with high-profile tourism through its penguin colony and many years of Grand Prix racing. About 18% of the island is preserved in fragmented nature reserves.

#### *Kangaroo Island, South Australia*

This island was the first site of European settlement in South Australia, in 1836, but it did not flourish as a settlement. Escaped convicts, sealers and sailors had lived on the island prior to formal settlement. A small population of farmers has remained and grown, but around half the island remains as natural vegetation. From the late nineteenth century, the island was a holiday destination and this is now a major element of the island's economy.

#### *Stradbroke Island, Queensland*

Elements of the 1840s convict establishment at Moreton Bay, including a quarantine station, were located on Stradbroke Island, which protects the bay from the open ocean. Free settlers moved in from the 1850s, largely working in fishing and oyster farming. One of the private landowners in the 1930s established a camp ground and holiday cabins, and tourism has grown since that time as the main focus of the island. During World War II an army base was established. A vehicle ferry service was initiated in 1947. The southern part of Stradbroke mostly comprises a conservation park while the northern part has a wide range of accommodation options available.

### **Conclusions**

*Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has a unique combination of historical overlays.

The Quod in *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is the only place in Australia where a purpose-built prison specifically for the detention of Aboriginal prisoners is known to have been constructed. It is a significant place in the history

of displacement of Aboriginal people across Western Australia. It is believed to be the site of the largest number of Aboriginal deaths in custody in Australia.

The tourist facilities within *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* are representative of the use of islands as metropolitan holiday destinations in all Australia's major cities, where a sense of distance can be obtained despite actually being close to home. In most other cities, the 'holiday islands' also have permanent populations and other land uses, including much in private ownership. Although privately operated, the *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* is rare as a government-owned assets on the holiday island.

The conversion of the Governor's Residence into hotel accommodation (Hotel Rottnest), and to a lesser degree, the conversion of the Boys' Reformatory reflects the adaptations made to many private grand residences in response to increased costs of upkeep.

The conversion of the Governor's Residence (Hotel Rottnest), Boys' Reformatory, Quarters buildings and cottages to hotel, hostel and cottage accommodation and the institution of campgrounds *Thomson Bay Settlement, Wadjemup/ Rottnest Island* has created a holiday village aesthetic that has considerable importance to both visitors to the State as well as the people of Western Australia

#### **13. 4 KEY REFERENCES**

*Thomson Bay Settlement: Conservation Plan* prepared for Rottnest Island Authority by Considine & Griffiths Architects and Oline Richards in 1994.

#### **13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

With further archaeological work, it may be possible for evidence of European settlement at Thomson Bay to be traced from 1829, rather than 1856.