

# Walyalup (Fremantle)

Walyalup is situated in Whadjuk Nyoongar *booja* – country. *Walyalup* is the place of the Walyo or Woylie, a small kangaroo rat that was once common in Fremantle. Nyoongar people have lived in this part of *booja* since the *Nyittiny* - creation times.



## Pre Contact

Pre history scientific dating confirms that the Australian continent has been occupied by Aboriginal people for at least 50,000 years. In the south west of Western Australia tools that are 35,000 years old, and Nyoongar remains that are between 12,000 and 20,000 years old, have been unearthed from an archaeological deposit in a limestone cave at Devil's Lair near Augusta. A more recent study says this date is more likely to go back some 50,000 years.

The Nyoongar people lived in balance with the natural environment. Their social structure was focused on the family with Nyoongar family groups occupying distinct areas of Nyoongar Country. It is variously estimated that the Nyoongar population, prior to the arrival of Europeans, was between 6,000 and tens of thousands. Nyoongar people lived by hunting and trapping a variety of game including kangaroos, possums and wallabies. They fished using spears and fish traps, as well as gathering an extensive range of wildlife and native plants such as Grass Trees (Balga) resin used for glue to make knives and axes.

Nyoongar people utilised quartz instead of flint for spear and knife edges, and developed the art of working quartz crystals. They wore the cloak of the kangaroo for warmth, especially in the colder areas of the south west. For the Nyoongar People in the Perth area the main source of food came from the sea, the Swan River and the extensive system of freshwater lakes and wetlands that once lay between the coast and the Darling Escarpment.

The town of Fremantle in *the Whadjuk* region has always been an important meeting place for Nyoongar people. The area contains many campsites and spiritual sites which have been used by Nyoongars from pre-contact to the present day.

One of these spiritual sites is *Manjaree*, otherwise known as Arthur Head. A *mandjar* is a sort of fair that takes place between different Nyoongar people who meet and exchange items. [\[i\]](#)

## 1827-29



When Captain James Stirling explored the Upper Swan River in March 1827, he had little contact with Nyoongar people but was amazed at the 'park-like landscape', which was created by Nyoongar fire-stick farming.<sup>[ii]</sup> Traditionally, Nyoongar people burn sections of dry bush before the rainy season to encourage re-growth of sweeter grasses. Fire-stick farming also enabled easier hunting of kangaroos and other animals.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1829 sovereignty was "assumed" over Nyoongar country by what is now the State of Western Australia. During 1829, over 600 Europeans or *wadjelas*, as they are known to Nyoongars, arrived at Fremantle and the Swan River Colony was established.

## 1830-33



As Fremantle area was a traditional Nyoongar meeting place, there was a good deal of contact between Nyoongars and *wadjelas*. This often turned to conflict, with the clash of traditional Nyoongar practices of hunting and gathering, and European ways of farming. In 1830 a detachment of soldiers led by Irwin attacked a Nyoongar encampment north of Fremantle in the belief that it contained men who had 'broken into and plundered the house of a man called Paton' and killed some poultry. Paton had called together a number of settlers who, armed with muskets, set after the Nyoongar people and came upon them not far from the home.

'The tall savage who appeared the Chief showed unequivocal gestures of defiance and contempt' and was accordingly shot. Irwin stated, "*This daring and hostile conduct of the natives induced me to seize the opportunity to make them sensible to our superiority, by showing how severely we could retaliate their aggression.*"

In actions that followed over the next few days, more Nyoongar people were killed and wounded. The main cause of much of the conflict between Nyoongars and Europeans was the different and often incompatible values held about the nature of land ownership and property. [\[iii\]](#) Nyoongar people do not think of the land as owning it, we consider it to be a part of us.

Midgeooroo, a senior and respected Nyoongar man, caused the new settlers considerable grief by attempting to resist their settlement of his country. After many confrontations he was caught and executed outside Perth gaol in May 1833. Recently, the lost burial site of Midgeooroo was located at the Deanery on St. Georges Terrace in Perth city. [\[iv\]](#)

Midgeooroo's son, Yagan – the Nyoongar resistance leader – was shot by a young bounty hunter on the Upper Swan a few months later. Yagan was both respected and feared by Europeans, and some were angry at the way in which Yagan had been entrapped and killed. [\[v\]](#) For Nyoongar people, Yagan is a symbol of resistance to European colonization and culture.

## 1840s



Early settler, Edward Hamersley, bought the properties Pyrton and Lockridge to the north of Guildford in the 1840s, and like other pastoralists, employed Noongar workers. The land was and is significant for Noongar people, encompassing traditional camp sites around Success Hill and Bennett's Brook. [\[vi\]](#) Nyoongar families continued to live on this private land, away from the control of the Native Welfare Department and the Bassendean Roads Board for almost one hundred years. [\[vii\]](#)

In 1842, George Fletcher Moore, Advocate General and a farmer who lived in the Upper Swan, published *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language in Common Use amongst the Aborigines of Western Australia*. Moore recorded a great deal of information about Nyoongar people's lore and customs and their relationship to the land.

## 1850s



Despite Europeans claiming the land, Nyoongar people set up semi-permanent camps to the north of Guildford and around the traditional meeting ground at Success Hill. For the most part, Nyoongars held onto our traditional ways and resisted attempts by European landowners to turn us into a servile class.[\[viii\]](#)

In 1851, the Convict Depot was established in Guildford and over the next 18 years a total of 9,000 men arrived in the colony.[\[ix\]](#) The convicts, and later, 'Ticket of Leave' men (who had been granted parole), began to live and work in Guildford, building roads, houses, bridges and other public works.

## 1860s



Enrolled Pensioner Guards, who supervised convict labour, settled on land grants in West Guildford. The grants were smaller land holdings of fenced two acre lots. [\[x\]](#) This expansion of European settlement forced more Nyoongars off country.

## 1900s



In 1901, when the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York visited WA, 110 Aboriginal people from the south-west were brought to West Guildford and camped on Old Guildford Road. They held corroborees and went sightseeing, which included a visit to the zoo.[\[xi\]](#)

At the end of 1903, the Chief Protector, Henry Prinsep decided to make Welshpool Reserve a ration depot. The reserve had been developed in 1899 as a small scale agricultural settlement for local Nyoongars. Prinsep insisted all Noongar people in the metropolitan area should be moved to the reserve, along with a European caretaker. Despite protests from the residents, Nyoongars from Guildford, Perth, Helena Valley, Gingin, Northam, York, Beverley, Busselton and Pinjarra were moved there. However, most only stayed a few years, and by 1908 the reserve was deserted.[\[xii\]](#)

In 1908, Welshpool Reserve closed and some of the former Nyoongar residents went to an old camping ground in West Guildford but they were soon moved by police to Success Hill.[\[xiii\]](#)

**In 1910**, Nyoongars camping at Success Hill were moved to the newly created reserve in South Guildford, which later became Allawah Grove.[\[xiv\]](#)

Nyoongar people also camped on farms along the Swan River. They chose sites, as had always been the practice, near good water supplies, such as springs (jump-ups) and streams.[\[xv\]](#)



## 1920s



As a result of the government's agricultural development programs, town reserves became the focus of the Nyoongar way of life. This had many negative effects on Nyoongar people, eroding our traditional practices and culture. Yet, historian Anna Haebich wrote that: 'Related families frequently visited between reserves, sharing companionship, food and entertainment' ... 'Dances, accompanied by a piano accordion, were often held around the camp fires at the reserves'.[\[xvi\]](#)



In 1921, the Repatriation Department claimed Hamersley's Pyrton Estate to convert to farms for returned soldiers. Pyrton Estate had been an important camping site for local Nyoongar people, and this created conflict when they were forced to leave.[\[xvii\]](#) Before the reclamation, Nyoongars had moved into the Guildford area each year for the grape and fruit picking season. They camped on the Pyrton Estate, and family and friends from the Beechboro and Lockridge camps often visited on weekends. Other camps included Guildford Bridge; Middle Swan Bridge; Upper Swan Bridge; Copely Road, Upper Swan; Jane Brook, Middle Swan; Benara Road area; and near the Helena River Bridge.[\[xviii\]](#)

In 1928, William Harris, a leader and civil rights advocate, led a deputation to the Premier of W.A., calling on the State Government to repeal the 1905 Act. Harris had been a private pupil at the "Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission" in Perth. He was a significant campaigner for Aboriginal civil rights and fought for over 22 years for Nyoongar people affected by the restrictions of the 1905 Act.[\[xix\]](#)

### 1930s



Military Forces took over Allawah Grove Reserve in South Guildford to use as an army camp. There was little or no alternative accommodation provided for Nyoongar people, who had no option but to move to relatives in Eden Hill.[\[xx\]](#)

In 1945, a proposal by the Church of Christ to build an Aboriginal Hostel in Mary Crescent, Bassendean was rejected, following a petition with 95 signatures to the Bassendean Road Board.[\[xxi\]](#)

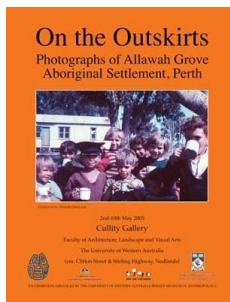
After the tough years of the Depression, work was more plentiful for Nyoongar people during the war years.

### 1950s



Many Nyoongar people lived in houses made from natural or recycled materials used in traditional ways. These included forked branches covered with tin, hessian bags or brush, as well as tents and tin shacks. [\[xxii\]](#) These kinds of houses maintained Nyoongar links to traditional living and were often in contrast with the European view: Southern Districts Officer, C. Wright Webster described ‘the housing conditions in this area as deplorable, and the worst he had seen anywhere’. He said that ‘Aboriginal people tend to be housed in mia mias, bag humpies, beaten tins on wooden framework, or dilapidated timber shacks with iron roofs. The most common type of dwelling is the tent’ [\[xxiii\]](#) Despite this, many Nyoongar people fondly recall those days when extended family groups lived together.

## 1968



Forty adults and 90 children from Allawah Grove moved into new homes in suburbs such as Balga, Hamilton Hill, Gosnells and Coolbellup. Only so-called ‘genuine’ residents of Allawah Grove were given houses. [\[xxiv\]](#) By January 1969 there were 31 Nyoongar people still living at Allawah Grove, despite the electricity, water and sewerage having been disconnected. The huts were destroyed in February 1969. [\[xxv\]](#)

## 1972



In 1972, an Aboriginal consulate was set up on Parliament House lawns to draw attention to the lack of housing for Nyoongar people in the metropolitan area. At the time, about 60 Nyoongars lived in camps around the Guildford area, in bush along Kalamunda Road and Lockridge, and near the Midland abattoir. [\[xxvi\]](#)

## 1994



The closure of many Aboriginal Reserves in the 1970s and the problems moving Nyoongar people into State housing in the metropolitan area, meant there were many homeless Nyoongars sleeping in parks, under bridges, in cars and near the river in the Swan Valley.[\[xxvii\]](#) After campaigning since 1977 for Nyoongar people to live on our own terms, the Fringe Dwellers of the Swan Valley received title to land at Lockridge in 1994.[\[xxviii\]](#)

## 2006



On 19th Sept 2006, the Federal Court brought down an historic judgment in favour of Nyoongar Native Title over the Perth metropolitan area: it is known as *Bennell v State of Western Australia* [2006] FCA 1243. Justice Wilcox found that Native Title continues to exist within an area in and around Perth. This is the first judgment which recognised Native Title over a capital city and its surroundings.

Evidence in support of this claim was heard at Guildford – the very same site where Nyoongars camped at the time of Europeans claiming our land. Justice Wilcox found the Nyoongar community had continued to exist and still practice many of our lores and customs. We did so despite the disruption resulting from being forced off our land as a consequence of white settlement and Government policies.



## References

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- [iv] *The West Australian*, 4 September 2010
- [v] *The Perth Gazette*, 20 July 1833.
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- [vii] Hamersley, correspondence, 25/5/1990, original held DIA, correspondence file 193/86, vol. 17, fol. 20-27, now SWALSC file RES003-06, Bennett Brook camp area 3840; Jennie Carter, *Bassendean : A Social History 1829-1979*, Perth, W.A : Town of Bassendean, 1986, p.245
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[xx] J. Carter, *Bassendean : A Social History 1829-1979*, p.243

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