

# Making tribes? Constructing Aboriginal tribal entities in Sydney and coastal NSW from the early colonial period to the present

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In 2002, the polemicist Keith Windschuttle excoriated the National Museum of Australia for 'misleading' the public in its depiction of the Wiradjuri War of 1823-1825. There was no group in the 1820s known as the Wiradjuri, he asserted. It was a term 'invented' by the amateur ethnologist John Fraser in the 1890s and, in support, cited the highly regarded, if occasionally eccentric, Norman Tindale.<sup>1</sup> Indeed Tindale had pointed to what he saw as the 'literary need' by Fraser to coin 'entirely artificial terms' for his Great Tribes. This, Tindale wrote, 'unfortunately' led to 'a rash of such terms' entering the 'popular literature'. He listed a number of these invented entities, including the Wiradjuri.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, Windschuttle concluded, the museum had made an 'embarrassing mistake' by 'promoting mythology rather than ... history'.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately Windschuttle commits the sin of researching by index and of course he is not alone. A more detailed reading of Tindale's text, however, reveals almost 50 references to the Wiradjuri prior to 1890 with a first mention by Taylor<sup>4</sup> in 1844, and quite separately, in the same year, G. A. Robinson<sup>5</sup> made a similar reference. It was not Fraser's invention and Tindale nowhere else makes the claim. So how had such confusion occurred?

Tindale intended but omitted to add either Kuringgai or Awabakal to his list of 'tribal' inventions, names Fraser clearly reformulated or concocted. According to Fraser, however, 'the Wiradhuri' was a name 'already established and in use',<sup>6</sup> and all this would have become obvious if the research had progressed beyond the original reference. It is a salutary lesson. Even revered writers like Tindale make unintended errors in their own work. It pays to check and even then no source is oracular.

Windschuttle's invective, despite its misdirected attack, highlights Tindale's observation that there are contrived 'tribal' names that have entered common usage to become certainties, and some care needs to be taken (even with his work). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Sydney region after British occupation. As the point of first contact, sources from this period have profoundly shaped the perception of Aboriginal coalescence, not only in the immediate Sydney region but well beyond. These key early sources, however, are so fragmented and contradictory they have misdirected our gaze and tempted invention.

### **The notion of 'tribes' in the greater Sydney region**

The problem of 'tribes' is in two parts. First, whether it is appropriate to apply the term 'tribe' at all; and second, just exactly what are the appropriate terms or names to apply to Indigenous groupings in the greater Sydney region at contact.

The notion of 'tribal' entities, so favoured by the British, did not necessarily feature prominently in Aboriginal preoccupation and identity. There were a suite and hierarchy of factors that contributed to conscious Aboriginal identity – initiation identifiers, elaborate kinship association, marriage bonds, totemic adherence and 'country' (place)<sup>7</sup> – wherein a group or clan identity did not rank prominently. The core of everyday Aboriginal coalescence, the extended family grouping, was so small it mandated marriage beyond the band. Conscious connection was generally focused externally, on complex links to others preferred above any possible inward-looking clan identity.

An observation made repeatedly by ethnologists is that the notion of 'tribe', with all its attendant assumptions, as Peterson<sup>8</sup> has summarised, is to be used judiciously. It is not an Indigenous but imposed concept, which in modern anthropological use is intended to encapsulate the affiliation of a number of extra-familial groups with sufficient affinity to induce social, economic, political and religious cooperation. This is hardly the hard-edged self-referential identity that the term 'tribe' implies in common parlance, or how it was intended at the time of British intrusion.<sup>9</sup>

This latter concept of 'tribe', of a named group, linked by common language to a defined geographic place, is very much the product of nascent ideas of European nationalism emerging in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coupled with an Enlightenment obsession with naming and classifying. It was an assumed aspect of contact populations rather than necessarily revealed from Indigenous sources, whose information at best merely validated British assumptions and expectations.

Yet it has come full circle to the present where Aboriginal people themselves have engaged in linking land, languages and 'tribal' entities. This is understandable in the light of land rights and the criteria for such claims as well as the desire to assert an Indigenous and moral presence on the landscape. Unfortunately it tends to

replicate the imperial preoccupations of contact occupation and adopts the impositions of colonial classification and identity.

In considering the Sydney region at the time of British occupation, another difficulty is encountered. The velocity of alteration to Aboriginal culture at the time of the First Fleet inevitably led to dramatic reconstruction of social connection. The people were ‘severely dislocated, with many bands completely destroyed’<sup>10</sup> – particularly after the smallpox epidemic of April 1789<sup>11</sup> – yet it remained remarkably adaptive, rapidly remaking itself ‘combining to form new groups’<sup>12</sup> in a way that belies the clichés of a timeless, static culture. The strategies for survival were far from the passive acquiescence of a people caught in the headlights of oncoming white culture.<sup>13</sup>

Even without the terminology of invasion, the dimension of British intrusion was catastrophic. Governor Phillip’s estimate of about 1500 Aborigines within the immediate Sydney region has not been seriously questioned. In contrast, 1000 or so disembarked from the First Fleet and a similar number from the second, over 2000 souls. To the British it was a puny toehold on a vast emptiness. To Aborigines it was an overwhelming incursion of people crowding a finely balanced space.

The British saw their own occupation as so profoundly tenuous that they were largely oblivious to the trauma of their presence, apart from the obvious impact of smallpox that destroyed 50 to 70 per cent of the Aboriginal population.<sup>14</sup> Even when they ventured inland from their coastal redoubt, the British perceived the relative absence of population as an emptiness rather than decimation or avoidance. It was an understandable ignorance but it is one that has continued to colour thinking to the present.

What can be readily assumed, however, is that the effect on Aboriginal social groupings would have been dramatic and any notion of ‘tribe’ would have been no longer fixed, if it ever was. Nevertheless the British persisted in the imposition of a notion of ‘tribes’ derived from their North American experience and elsewhere.

The classification and naming of ‘tribes’ in the Sydney region – how the ‘various tribal groups ... “fitted in” to the overall pattern of occupation in the Sydney Basin’ – has been a matter of considerable controversy.<sup>15</sup> Ross sees it basically as a conflict between her ethnohistorical and Kohen’s linguistic approach, with contributions by Capell,<sup>16</sup> Poiner<sup>17</sup> and others, but the issue is wider and far from so simply construed.

The ethnographic observations and linguistic collections by officers in the First Fleet, while acknowledged as garbled and incomplete, have, by necessity, been relied upon heavily, including recent reconstructions of Attenbrow<sup>18</sup> and Smith.<sup>19</sup> Officer observations have profoundly influenced our understanding of the wider coastal and inland region, from the south coast to Newcastle and inland across the Blue Mountains, but it has also shaped an extremely Sydney-centric view. Our understanding of Aboriginal coalescence and identity, however, only becomes clear

when the region as a whole is considered rather than beginning at Port Jackson and spreading out like the contagion of British first contact. The foundational distortion of First Fleet officers, earnest and sympathetic as they were, has been augmented by observations by subsequent well-meaning missionaries and later creative contributions by amateur ethnologists of nineteenth century enthusiasm. The value is undoubted, the quality variable, and the legacy one to be approached with caution. It is a story of misunderstanding, evolving usage, and well-meaning invention derived from different historical periods that together have been compressed to form fact. Just how confusing the end result can be is seen by placing the ‘tribal’ maps of various authors alongside one another – ‘tribes’ migrate across the landscape and names appear and disappear or are simply added into the mix. Only by teasing out the usages from the various eras does the origin of many ‘tribes’ become clear.

The purpose here is to explore this evolution of terminology and the gathering of ‘tribal’ names. This has moved through four discernable phases: the Officer Period 1789-1800; the Missionary Period 1820-1870; the late Victorian Anthropologist Period 1880-1904; and the Period of Present Construction.

### **The Officer Period (1789-1800)**

There is nothing more quintessentially Australian than the kangaroo, and when the British arrived they had a name, given to them by James Cook (via Joseph Banks), for this immense rodent-like creature. Unfortunately, to the Aboriginal people of Port Jackson the term was as intelligible as the rest of the imported language and these linguistic confusions and assumptions were to persist in the history of early contact.

In April 1791, three years after occupation, Watkin Tench revealed a fundamental confusion where it was assumed the word *beeal* signified ‘good’ when in fact, it actually meant ‘no’. The ‘cause of our error’ came from the fact that they knew that the term for ‘bad’ was *weeree*, and sought to find its opposite by joking with Arabanoo that everything he liked was *weeree* ‘in order to provoke him to tell us that it was good’. Arabanoo responded with *beeal* ‘which we translated ... for “good”’, whereas he sought to ‘deny our inference’ and had simply said ‘No!’<sup>20</sup>

Not only was there this rampant confusion over even the most basic words, it was compounded by a creole – the NSW pidgin – that rapidly emerged as an intermediate lingua franca. The language researcher, Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld, later called this a ‘barbaric language’ wherein ‘blacks and whites labour under the mistaken idea, that each one is conversing in the other’s language’. Indeed Threlkeld, admittedly working on language further north at Lake Macquarie, suggests *ke-a-wai* for ‘no’ and *bail* as a barbarism for ‘no’. He also nominates *be-el* for ‘mock’, so Tench may still have been wrong and Arabanoo may have been expressing exasperation at the persistent inability of his white interlocutors to understand and



*Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld, 1788-1859. (Photo: State Library of NSW)*

instead said something like ‘You mock me’, if one accepts Threlkeld’s contention that language was basically common from Lake Macquarie to Sydney.<sup>21</sup>

Some linguists would strongly dispute this, even though Enright<sup>22</sup> wrote, like Threlkeld, that a ‘comparison of the vocabularies of various tribes’ from ‘south of the Clarence to Botany Bay shows no great variation among them’ and Dawson,<sup>23</sup> writing in the 1830s, makes a similar claim.

Differences litter the landscape with Lissarrague,<sup>24</sup> for instance, although relying heavily in her work on Threlkeld, suggesting in contradiction to him that *payilma* was the word for ‘mock’. Whatever the case, certainty eludes. The word lists that survive from the period are basic at best and generally not the record of nuanced speech.

Given this foundational confusion, cautious credence needs to be accorded to the early reports of Sydney officers, particularly as they inevitably borrowed from one another and this repetition has been taken for corroboration rather than well-meaning plagiarism. Confusion becomes fact by a repetition and confirmed by the lapse of time.<sup>25</sup>

### **Governor Phillip’s official report on ‘tribal’ names, 1790**

One of the key sources of information on Sydney ‘tribal’ names comes from Governor Phillip’s letter of 13 February 1790 to Lord Sydney. His informants were principally Bennelong, Colbee and Arabanoo, which, given Tench’s comic confusion of language with Arabanoo, should merit caution, yet Phillip has been read as gospel on the subject since. Phillip was emphatic: ‘The natives live in tribes, which are distinguished by the names of their chief, who probably takes his name from the district in which he resides’, three powerful and persistent assumptions.<sup>26</sup>

Phillip goes on particularly to mention the Cammerragal as an example of his assumptions and to emphasise their role in the tooth avulsion ceremony. He then described the Cadigal, Wangal, and Wallumedigal as well as the Gweagal, Noronggerragal, Borogegal, Gommerigal, and Boromedegal.<sup>27</sup> While all sound wonderfully authentic, there is reason to question some in particular.

### **Wangal – where?**

A clue to just how extensive the confusion was may be detected in the description of the Wangal, supposedly the ‘tribe’ of Bennelong, Sydney’s most famous Aboriginal personage. His ‘tribe’ was described as between Sydney (Darling Harbour) and Parramatta, although mention is not made again in the literature until revived by later authors. The word wan for ‘Rose Hill’ (Parramatta) appeared in an anonymous wordlist, attributed by Jakelin Troy<sup>28</sup> to Phillip, Hunter and Collins (1790-1792),<sup>29</sup> and as wann in Dawes’s notebooks,<sup>30</sup> although Smith<sup>31</sup> suggests wanne meant west.

Threlkeld, with some support in Curr and Mathews, although not from Collins<sup>32</sup> indicated won or wahn meant where?<sup>33</sup> If Threlkeld's vocabulary can be accepted as having currency closer to Sydney, however, a rough translation might suggest Bennelong came, not from the 'Rose Hill Tribe', but from the 'Where Tribe', which is obviously nonsense. What seems possible, however, in those early days of rampant language confusion, was that the helpful Bennelong, responding to questions of his place of origin, in a form of mimicry common with Aborigines simply translated the question, 'Where (do you) belong?' – won gal.

This is not as odd as it sounds. Threlkeld gives insight into Aboriginal responses in a story involving Biraban, his Aboriginal informant. Biraban was asked for the name of the 'native cat' and he replied minnaring. As the questioner was about to write this down as the name for 'native cat', Threlkeld interrupted to point out that all Biraban was doing was translating his question, 'What is it?'<sup>34</sup> But for his intercession the native cat might have become a 'What is it' in the same way Bennelong's 'tribe' may have become the 'Where do you belong'.

### **Cammerragal**

Another of Phillip's 'tribal' entities, and one that features prominently in both Phillip and Collins, is the Cammerragal. Towards the end of November 1789 Bennelong was kidnapped, and in the ensuing attempts at communication tried to explain to his captors that his people were under the command of their traditional leaders – the Cammerra. This would have been a logical line of interrogation by the British who, as military men, sought to identify chiefs and leaders.

Bennelong's invitation to Phillip to attack the Cammerra would naturally lend credence to the view that it was an enemy 'tribe', but the descriptions by Collins of initiation ceremonies held at Farm Cove offer another line of inquiry. The Cammerra, Collins suggested, 'could oblige' local people 'to attend wherever and whenever they directed' for to them 'belonged the exclusive and extraordinary privilege of exacting a tooth from the natives of other tribes inhabiting the sea-coast'. They clearly organised and officiated at these important manhood initiation ceremonies, as well as 'contests or decisions of honour',<sup>35</sup> the dispute resolution system of ritual battles and punishments. The role was obviously central, yet Collins sees them, like Phillip, first as a singular chiefly personage who 'wore all the teeth about his neck' and then as a 'tribe', rather than viewing them principally through their *function*.<sup>36</sup> The need to find 'tribes' overwhelmed their thinking.

Philip Gidley King also makes a similar assumption in April 1790, that the Cammerragal was 'a great Warrior' and that Bennelong 'must have had some severe Conflicts with him, As he shews several Scars of Wounds inflicted by him'.<sup>37</sup> Understandably, it did not occur to King that Bennelong was explaining traditional ritual scarification practices, of scars or mombarai earned through initiation, not through fierce battle.

Clearly the Cammerra were powerful 'headmen' with significant ritual roles and further clues can be gleaned from Howitt in the late nineteenth century, and his description of the Gommera among the coastal Yuin – the 'g' and 'c' are readily interchangeable as are the vowels 'a' and 'o'.<sup>38</sup> For a Gommera to be 'fitted for office', Howitt suggested, he had to be 'a medicine man, be aged, able to speak several languages (dialects) and be, above all, able to perform feats of magic' at initiation ceremonies.<sup>39</sup>

The misunderstanding of the early officers begins to emerge. The Cammerra/Gommera were both individuals *and* formed a significant hierarchical group, but not a 'tribe'. The confusion was compounded by the British taking gal to mean 'tribe' rather than the more generic sense of 'belonging to' or 'of'.<sup>40</sup> Although a number of prominent Cammerra/Gommera headmen belonged to the north shore of Port Jackson they were obviously distributed more widely, creating enough confusion to require a separate inland territorial identity for the Gommeragal. King located them inland although Smith nominates a location at Darling Harbour.<sup>41</sup> It likely amounts to simple repetition.

It was the Gommera who supervised the initiation and tooth avulsion ceremonies that made men of boys and it was only the Gommera and Koragee (the 'clever men' of the highest initiation degrees) who could teach the newly initiated men the Law. The Gommera were, like the ancient rabbis, both ritual leaders and warriors.

Kohen and Lampert assume this when they suggest that Gommeragal and Bidjigal were probably derived from the words gommera (headman on the NSW south coast), and bidja bidja (headman among the Wiradjuri).<sup>42</sup> But this may have been more Lampert's understanding as in Kohen's later work he ignores this, and has Gommerigal, Camaraigal, Bedigal and Bidjigal all identified as separate Sydney 'tribes'.<sup>43</sup>

Howitt<sup>44</sup> had earlier made the same observation that Bidja-Bidja (Bedia Bedia)<sup>45</sup> was the inland (and Wiradjuri) name for a Gommera.<sup>46</sup> But once again the early British took this as a tribal entity, the Bediagal, what Collins described as the 'Woods tribe'.<sup>47</sup> This became fixed in British thinking after Bennelong named Pemulwuy, the later scourge of the Hawkesbury, as a Bediagal. Dawes, through his Aboriginal informant Patyegarang, describes, 'Pemul-why: Bediagal. Tugagal. tugara',<sup>48</sup> but this can be transcribed to suggest Pemulwuy was a headman, who belonged to the inland woods (tugagal) and was one of the inland Woods people (tugara).

This suggests an hypothesis that strongly contradicts the accepted view, for if Bedia is a Wiradjuri derived term then the people from beyond the Blue Mountains either regularly visited or inhabited the inland Hawkesbury region. Collins described Wur-gan as 'a very fine lad' whose mother had been 'born and bred





*Bennelong. (RAHS Collection.)*

beyond the mountains' and who had been 'obliged to submit to the embraces of an amorous and powerful Be-dia-gal'.<sup>49</sup> This would indicate that the Blue Mountains, which were mythologised as an impenetrable barrier until 'conquered' by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, were, in fact, quite permeable.

The Cammeragal and Bediagal, seen by the British primarily as a tale of tribal might, becomes one of quite different power. Both as individuals *and* as a group, they were headmen and lawmen, vital to the ritual life of the people, not a 'tribe'. They were a class of initiates of higher degree linked by the stature of their office, not geography.

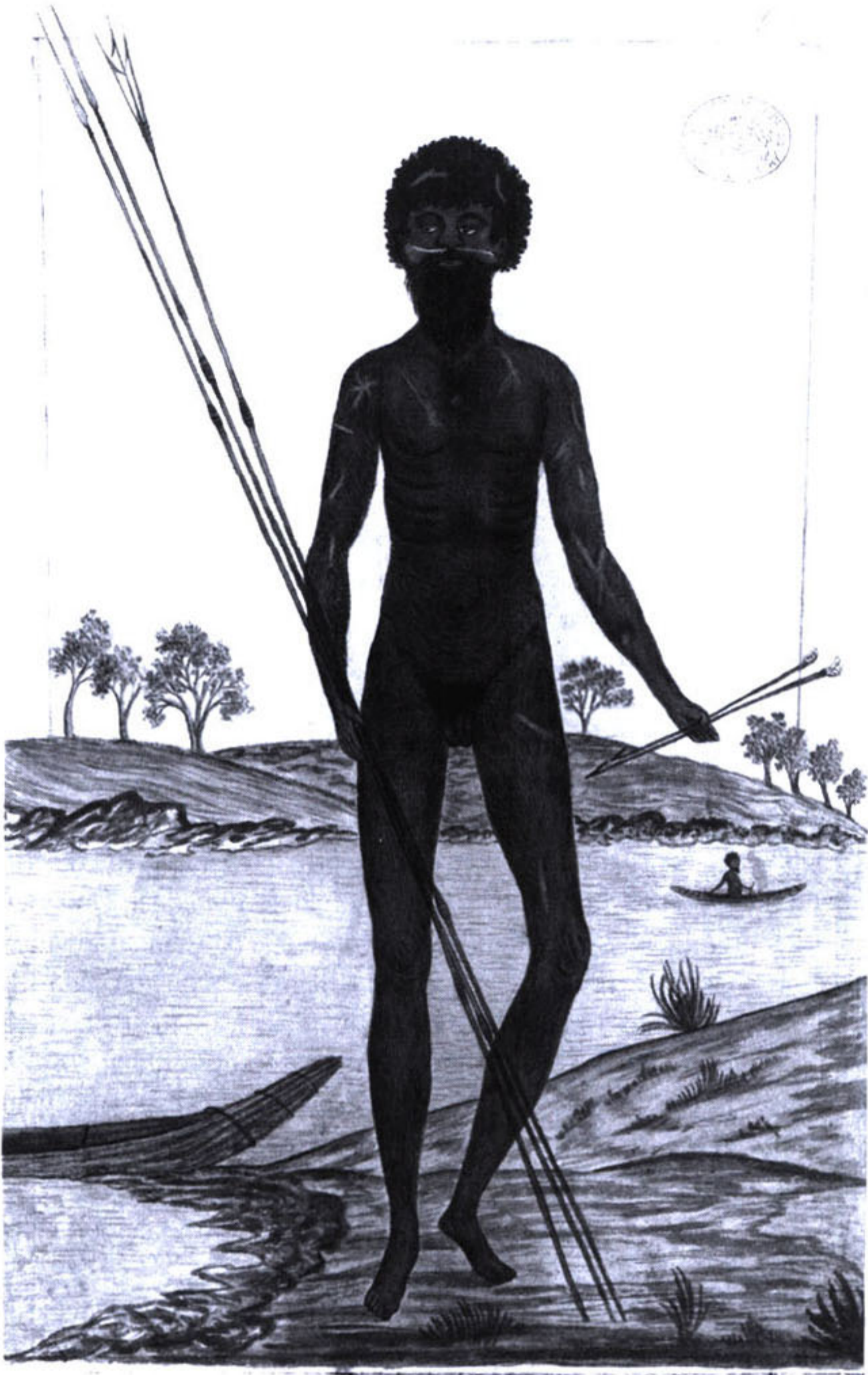
Their authority, however, rapidly declined. Once the Gommera/Cammerra had the power to confiscate the tin and leather shield given to Bennelong by the British because it gave unfair advantage in combat and was thus not honourable. Once Bennelong had complained to Phillip that the Cammeragal and Bediagal were bad men and should be killed. Now, as his influence with the British increased and the standing of the Gommera waned, Bennelong recanted and bragged of being accepted to perform the tooth knocking duties of a Gommera himself at a ceremony on the North Shore.

Yet the misconceptions persisted. In 1795 at the initiation ceremony performed at Sydney when the headmen from a number of mobs attended – including Pemulwuy – David Collins was still under the misapprehension the Cammeragal were a superior and numerous super tribe. This need in the Officer Period to name tribes has continued to influence later writers, like the respected Norman Tindale, to regard the Cammeragal as a 'tribal' entity.

## **Eora**

One of the names commonly encountered in the Officer Period is Eora, which First Fleet diarists took to mean, people or the men.<sup>50</sup> What is odd, a puzzle Attenbrow discusses,<sup>51</sup> is that the name entirely disappears from recorded use after the Officer Period and is only revived as a 'tribe' in the late nineteenth century and particularly by Tindale in his 1974 *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*. In the early nineteenth century, however, Eora disappears from use and a term of similar meaning, Koorie, takes its place.

It is tempting to suggest that Eo-ra and Koray, Kore, Koorie, Kuri, Cooree and Gooree are in some way related and, although the linguistic evidence is scant, Eora may be a misconstruction or error in transcription – and unlikely to be corrected by local Aborigines, who were never entirely sure the British were using an English term or supposed native term. It may even have been another comic example of mimicked repetition of the question, 'You're a ...?', so fraught is the recording of these early terms.



*This Man's name is Cameragal, the Chief of the most powerfull Tribe that we at present know of in New south Wales. He holds two fighting spears and a Digging in one hand and two throwing sticks in the other.* 62

"Cameragal, the chief of the most powerful Tribe in New South Wales", by Port Jackson Painter, 1790-1792. (Drawing 53 from the Watling Collection; National History Museum.)

Such misunderstandings were easy when dealing with an unfamiliar vocabulary. William Scott, for example, in the 1850s writes the word Cooree for 'blackfellow' and records the name of the 'tribe' as Gringai, although they share the same root – he writes Kuri as Gri in the 'tribal' entity but Kuri as Cooree for the description of the people.<sup>52</sup> The scope for misconstruction when there was no standard phonetic system was great, although whatever the similarity in the meaning of Eora and Kuri, emanating as they do from different periods, still does not provide the evidence in either case for a 'tribal' entity.

Fraser later invented a new 'tribal' name, Kuringgai, for the people of Sydney and the Hunter Valley in 1892. This invention was clearly based on Fraser's familiarity with the use of Gringai by Boydell<sup>53</sup> and Scott to describe the black men.<sup>54</sup> As often occurred, Fraser created his own spelling of Gringai, from Kuri, to create Kuringgai.

Among hunter/gatherers it was common to refer to themselves as '*the people*' – not just *a people* but *the people* – a referential assertion of their centrality in the universe. The use of Kuri, however, implies more than just *the men* but specifically *initiated* men. The very concept of adult *men* in Aboriginal society presupposes initiation: it is not a general but specific term reflecting preoccupation with transition from youth to manhood and the esteem of initiation. As Elkin emphasises, language is 'related to culture and cannot be understood ... without knowledge of tribal thought, belief and custom'.<sup>55</sup>

It further underscores the importance in Aboriginal identity of the rituals of initiation and those responsible for the conduct of such rituals, the Gommera. That this features so prominently in matters of self-conscious Aboriginal identity means it should come as no surprise that it creeps into British attempts to establish 'tribal' entities. The Aboriginal informants were mainly men, as were the British recorders, and both were of patriarchal predisposition. It is no sop to political correctness to suggest that had the informants been mainly female and the recorders sympathetic women then the 'tribal' descriptors constructed by the British may have reflected more the elements of marriage and kinship than initiation.

### **Booroberongal (1791) and Cadigal (1790)**

While initiation identifiers featured prominently in Aboriginal identity – along with totem and moiety – place or country featured as well, although again this does not necessarily produce the hard edged 'tribal' descriptors beloved of the British.

In April 1791, a party led by Phillip set out from Rose Hill (Parramatta) accompanied by Colbee and Boladeree as guides.<sup>56</sup> The diaries of this journey have tended to lock in firm views of Aboriginal relations and language. Tench writes, in April 1791, that shortly after leaving Rose Hill their Aboriginal guides 'were in country unknown to them ... being absolute strangers inland'.<sup>57</sup> The Aborigines accompanying

them were not only lost and useless as guides, according to Tench, they were extremely fearful of encounters with locals and expressed considerable hostility.

The account seems straightforward and is taken by Ross as conclusive evidence that ‘these two Cadigal men, from the Eora territory ... did not know much about the Darug landscape and way of living’.<sup>58</sup> But this is at odds with other information. Aborigines routinely travelled far from their local range and Threlkeld relates examples of regular visits of people between Newcastle and the Hawkesbury. Over 200 Aborigines, clearly from numerous groups, attended to feasting on a bloated whale corpse at Manly in September 1790, so movement was extensive even if constrained by negotiated entry.

Aborigines also demonstrated exceptional memory and were amazed the British could not recall paths through new country as they could. Examples abound, too, where Aborigines back-tracked for hours to locate an important trinket dropped by some careless European. What then happened with Colbee and Boladeree?

Tench is keen to portray a ‘boy’s own’ adventure. ‘No words could unfold to an Indian’, Tench wrote, ‘the motives of curiosity which induce men to encounter labour, fatigue and pain’ when they could simply ‘remain in repose at home, with a sufficiency of food’.<sup>59</sup> It goes without saying this adventure was conducted with military precision – and a compass to traverse the landscape.

This is utterly opposite to Aboriginal use of defined customary trails, and by being off the customary paths they signalled a hostile intent, behaving like an enemy raiding party. It is no wonder they were extremely apprehensive, having violated serious customary practice. They were rightly fearful of the consequences. But not lost.

When Colbee was asked the name of this inland group, Tench records his answer as Boorooberongal. Enright<sup>60</sup> suggests an answer in two parts, burri (country) and biroongal (people of the deep river), a reference to place and country not necessarily a ‘tribe’, although Wilkins and Nash advance a different analysis.<sup>61</sup>

At the inevitable meeting with the locals, Colbee describes himself as ‘of the tribe of Cadigal’<sup>62</sup> but this again is a reference to place and country, not ‘tribe’. Cadi suggests a garbling of Kut-hai, a reference to the sea coast, as this is a variation in the name for sea coast people recorded hundreds of kilometres up and down the coast.<sup>63</sup> A broad demarcation between saltwater people and inland people is a distinction frequently found elsewhere in Australia.

While there were differences of culture and practice, it did not necessarily imply a different language. Phillip, in his version of the 1791 journey, states that, ‘had they known [the language] well I think they would have conversed in it, which they never attempted’, and Ross cites this as evidence the languages were distinct and not simply dialects.<sup>64</sup> Tench, on the other hand, reports on the same journey, that ‘our natives and the strangers conversed on a par and understood each other perfectly’,

although he acknowledged they ‘spoke different dialects’,<sup>65</sup> and Dawes’s<sup>66</sup> brief comparative word list similarly shows little difference.

There seems sufficient evidence to suggest, as have Kohen<sup>67</sup> and Capell,<sup>68</sup> that the inland and coastal peoples spoke a common language with dialectic differences, although Wilkins and Nash in their impressive and detailed analysis of this historic incident would not go so far as to include the Hawkesbury as a form of Sydney language.<sup>69</sup> Despite differences of linguistic opinion, the inland and coastal languages had far more in common than the First Fleet officers suggested.

Collins admitted, in February 1791, their knowledge of Aboriginal language consisted of ‘only a few terms for such things as, being visible could not be mistaken’ but ‘no one had yet attained words enough to convey an idea in connected terms’.<sup>70</sup> Even five years later, Collins was still saying ‘language indeed is out of the question’ with only ‘a barbarous mixture of English with Port Jackson dialect’ spoken and even here ‘the natives have the advantage, comprehending with much greater aptness than we can’.<sup>71</sup> In other words they did not even have sufficient Aboriginal language to conduct the most basic conversation, which gives considerable insight into why information of the Officer Period was so wrong and why linguistic details and local ‘tribal’ names should be treated with caution.

What ‘tribal’ groups existed at occupation remains conjecture, although by the early 1800s Joseph Holt was identifying the ‘tribes’ around Sydney with mainly English names and by locality and alliances.<sup>72</sup> By 1815, with the Sydney mob in tatters, Bungaree and his Broken Bay ‘tribe’ were invited by Governor Macquarie to settle at George’s Head as an entirely reconstructed Sydney ‘tribe’.

It has been suggested that Aborigines placed relatively little importance on tribal names or identity and this is highlighted in the evidence of Mahroot,<sup>73</sup> the so-called ‘last’ of the Sydney blacks, in the 1845 Select Committee. When he was questioned about the traditional name of the original Sydney people, he answered, ‘They do give them a name, I do not know what it was.’

Asked what the nearby Liverpool Aborigines called his people now, he replied ‘Botany Bay Moora’, moora meaning your place. When Mahroot was asked what he called the Liverpool blacks, he answered humorously, ‘Cobrakalls’, and added, ‘same as you call the French people’. Cobra was the name for a woodworm, the foul smelling edible teredo mollusc the Liverpool blacks favoured, and Mahroot was obviously alluding to the contempt the English shared when referring to the French taste for snails.<sup>74</sup> This echoes the habit observed in North America where Indian tribes occasionally acquired derogatory names from other groups, which became fixed by European usage.

Names, then, appeared to have no particular significance and when they were applied, were more a function of what *others* applied than what groups called themselves.<sup>75</sup> The local Aboriginal people knew who they were, and most everyone

else in their territory, and primarily differentiated themselves by insignias of initiation, country, totem or moiety. They seemed to have little use beyond that for naming themselves. The tribal names coined by British officers in 1790s faded into insignificance until resurrected by later scholars looking for evidence of the original people. A list of names awaited and considerably more would be added and amended. The inland Bediagal or Woods tribe, for instance, disappeared, to be reconstructed 100 years later as the land of the Dharrook, a term unknown to the officers of the First Fleet.

### **The Missionary Period (1820-1870)**

While it is a legacy of mixed consequence, it is to the missionaries we owe most for recording the Aboriginal religion, languages, and culture. After an inauspicious start with the Reverend Samuel Marsden, who as a missionary made an excellent farmer, it was left to those like Threlkeld, Watson, Ridley and Mansfield to hear and record the Aboriginal story.

In 1821 Rev William Walker listed nine tribes in the region around the growing city of Sydney, but only three by this time could he describe as numerous.<sup>76</sup> Reverend Ralph Mansfield, in the same year, soberly recorded the awareness by Aborigines in the Sydney district of their increasingly perilous position: 'Blackman die fast, more whiteman come. Old black men nigh all gone. Soon no blackman, all whiteman.'<sup>77</sup> It was the deep and saddened awareness of the passing of culture and living in barely more than a generation.

It was in such an atmosphere that Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld set up his mission by 1825 at Lake Macquarie and was beginning to learn the Aboriginal language. He was steeped in the London Missionary Society (LMS) creed of learning local language as a means of conversion, a task the LMS performed with zeal in Polynesia.<sup>78</sup> In the Australian context, however, he was unusual. Others like Reverend Charles Wilton in 1828, saw attempting 'a written language of their own dialects' as an 'unnecessary trouble', given declining numbers and the prevalence of English.<sup>79</sup>

What stands out in Threlkeld, who by 1830 spoke the Aboriginal language fluently, is that he never offered a name for the language he spent much of his life describing. His authoritative works on the Sydney to Hunter River region offered only the general name, *Aboriginal language*.

This was not simple ignorance, for Threlkeld's collaborator and teacher was Biraban,<sup>80</sup> an important cultural broker whose expertise in English and Aboriginal language was an invaluable asset to Threlkeld. With Biraban's advice Threlkeld could with authority report to the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1838 that the same Aboriginal language was spoken between the Hunter River and Sydney, from the coast to the mountains, 'extending inland some 60 miles'. Even the dialect of Sydney and Botany Bay 'varies in ... slight degree' from Lake Macquarie,

although with 'those further distant, the difference' prevents communication.<sup>81</sup> Threlkeld's contemporary Robert Dawson, in the 1820s further north at Port Stephens, also suggested, 'from the Hawkesbury to Port Macquarie they speak the same language on the Coast, with some slight variation'.<sup>82</sup>

Threlkeld's and Dawson's observations of language, although long after initial settlement, are of considerable importance and are frequently ignored. The differences of dialect at the geographical extremities may have been marked but, despite intervening gradations and provincialisms, understanding over a considerable area was possible more so than early British officers like Collins imply.<sup>83</sup> What constitutes a 'language' rather than a dialect is definitionally fraught and is as much a matter, as Dixon<sup>84</sup> points out, of Indigenous perception as actual difference. Despite occasional commonality and mutual comprehension, Aboriginal groups frequently insist on 'language' distinction one from another.

Observations of difference, where little or none existed, often lay in the fact that more than one word existed for almost everything, if for no other reason than linguistic nuance. For example, Threlkeld was initially confused by the word for 'head', which he knew to be *woll-ung*. In 1827 he showed an anatomical drawing of a head to Biraban, who pointed out that while the 'head' was *woll-ung* the skull bone was *kob-bah-rah*.<sup>85</sup> What appears as dialectic difference seems rather to amount to subtle differences in meaning.<sup>86</sup>

Threlkeld also recognised other reasons for multiple words. For instance, 'kangaroo' had distinct names according to sex, size, or places of haunt<sup>87</sup> for as Enright observed, the 'native was a keen naturalist' and 'distinguished the different species of animal and vegetable life' which to the casual inquirer may appear to be 'dialectic or linguistic differences'.<sup>88</sup>

There was yet another reason for multiple names rooted in religion 'where words of all types are liable to taboo and replacement from a neighbouring tongue'.<sup>89</sup> Personal names, as Ridley pointed out, were nature based.<sup>90</sup> Death meant such everyday names and words could not be mentioned, which necessitated a very large number of stand-in words. As Fraser observed, there was 'a continual changing of the names of things' because even 'the mention of the dead man's name would offend, and bring vengeance on them in the night'.<sup>91</sup> This practice of changing and forbidding words for a period of decency shows how an amateur gatherer of vocabulary might believe they were hearing two separate languages.

It was reasonable then for Threlkeld to suggest that although groups within 100 kilometres may not immediately understand a newcomer, after a short time they could freely converse. This implies a related language group over a vast area, not simply the immediate Sydney basin. That does not, of course preclude 'tribal' or clan divisions. Nor does it preclude intense inter-clan rivalry and conflict; quite the contrary.



What is suggested, however, is that the assumption of the Officer Period of 'tribes' with separate languages occupying defined territories, is an imperial assumption that still informs modern linguistic assumptions. The need for a self-referential 'tribal' name was not an Aboriginal preoccupation, a point emphasised by Threlkeld in not entitling the language he described. Elkin similarly suggests that while Aboriginal clans 'know themselves' it is often difficult to elicit a distinct name and 'indeed it may not exist'.<sup>92</sup>

It was Hale, who gleaned so much from Threlkeld who named the language Kāmilarai, although he acknowledged the people had no 'general word' for their language and, 'None is given by Mr Threlkeld, to whom it would doubtless have been known.' The 'name Kāmilarai', he pointed out, was a name given by the neighbouring 'natives of the Wellington Valley',<sup>93</sup> and in this he makes clear names are rarely self-referential but are often imposed by others. What he did not fully appreciate at the time was that the distinguishing marker was the word for 'no': Kamilaroi is derived from Kummil, the word for 'no', just as Wiradjuri is derived from Wirrai, the word for 'no' in that country.<sup>94</sup>

Why there is reliance on terms of negation to distinguish one group from another has no conclusive explanation and is extremely odd to our way of thinking. In a society, however, that moved continually across the landscape and the area of others for ritual and other ceremonial purposes, as well as food gathering, negotiating *permission* was a vital and continual part of interaction. Aboriginal 'ownership' of territory tended to be layered and while access may be exclusive for some purposes (for example, custodianship of sacred sites), it may be shared for other purposes and even alter seasonally. There are always umbral and penumbral areas, 'grey areas' that need to be accessed mindfully. So saying 'no', making conditional permission for entry, creates clear boundaries in the same way a survey peg does for European occupation. But it is not the same as the lines on a map that are now advanced as 'tribal boundaries'.

### **Relationships: performances that connect**

The relative unimportance of 'tribal' names (and why Biriban did not impress upon Threlkeld any particular 'tribal' entity) becomes clear when account is taken of regional demography at the time of British intrusion. Taking Phillip's approximation of 1500 Aboriginal people living in the Sydney area and allowing for a similar number inland with an equal number in the valleys beyond the Blue Mountains, we arrive at a maximum of around 4500 people in the greater Cumberland region.

This is a remarkably small number of people who basically spoke the same language and knew one another if not by face then by name and reputation. They were deeply conscious of connections and the imperative to marry out ensured this.

Links of kinship, of extended family tied to land, or *taorie*,<sup>95</sup> and further links to totem groups, created webs of connection, obligation and alliance.<sup>96</sup> These were enacted through ceremony and ritual, marriage and initiation, in the 'great marrying circles', which formed the basis of movement and meeting. Families travelled hundreds of kilometres from the inland, or up or down the coast, to attend these great ceremonies held every few years. They were complex, multiple affairs where people met to reaffirm old relationships, arrange future marriages, exchange wives, initiate boys into manhood and settle old legal disputes or recent feuds.

Howitt tells of a great marriage circle that travelled north along the coast from Merimbula to Port Jackson and further north to Port Stephens. Here the circle turned inland crossing the mountains and then headed south, only to cross back to its beginning at Merimbula. Fraser, too, recorded such journeys, often over 1000 kilometres.<sup>97</sup>

Marriage circles also validated initiation ceremonies, for instance, where tooth avulsion was practised: 'The tooth would be carried by the Gommerera of the place most distant from the youth it belonged to', then pass to the next headman, from one group to the next of the 'inter-marrying community', finally returning to its owner and conveying the 'message that so-and-so has been made a man'.<sup>98</sup> The ritual significance of the circles meant they were paths of importance with sacred initiation and ritual objects passing along these routes.<sup>99</sup>

They remained, though, paths of prosaic social perambulation ingrained in behaviour, to the constant irritation of Europeans, who saw the reasons for travel as inconsequential. Threlkeld lamented Biraban travelling to Windsor 'in order to teach other tribes a new song and dance', the enthusiasm for which was not dampened by the fact that the dialect of the song 'is very different to that used in these parts of the Sea coast'.<sup>100</sup> Threlkeld quickly learned the tendency of his intended Christian converts to go walkabout. In 1827, only 18 months after beginning the Lake Macquarie mission, he was left with only '20 or 30 ... the remainder ... with the boys and girls, being at Sydney or Newcastle'.<sup>101</sup>

What importance, then, may be ascribed to 'tribal' entities when confronted by the imperatives of connection and the constant wandering to make it possible? These ceremonial circuits crossed over land and language boundaries generating a sense of inclusion and connection for communities spanning huge tracts of territory. Class and totem descent, marriage and kinship relationships were all important. Whatever sense of clan or mob solidarity that prevailed was of a lower order of priority in establishing identity and was rarely consciously self-referential.

### **The Late Victorian Anthropologist Period (1880-1904)**

By the time A. W. Howitt published his major work in 1904, just a few years before his death, he noted his work relied on material collected before 1890, since

most of the 'tribal remnants' of south-east Australia had 'lost the knowledge of the beliefs and customs of their fathers'.<sup>102</sup> While there was truth in this, it also expressed the morbid fascination of the period with recording the last gasp of the 'dying race'. And this provided an opportunity, largely unconscious, for observers to write without the possibility of contradiction, as the evidence was interred with their informants.

A great debt, however, is owed to the amateur anthropologists of the period such as Curr, Fraser, Howitt, Mathews and Enright.<sup>103</sup> These were amateurs in the nineteenth century tradition of scholarship convinced of the certainty of their opinions and for this, allowance has to be made. There were inevitable errors, a temptation to construct beyond the evidence and a tendency to build on the errors of others.

For example, Curr's four-volume work<sup>104</sup> contains information by Robert Miller on the Hunter River 'tribe' he named the Wonnarua.<sup>105</sup> Later, other articles appeared to support this assertion. In 1897, 11 years after Curr, J. W. Fawcett again described this 'tribe',<sup>106</sup> now spelled Wonnah-ruah although the article provides such striking similarities to the content of Miller as to suggest plagiarism.<sup>107</sup>

Tindale quotes four sources for the name Wonnaruah in his 1974 publication: Miller and Fawcett, previously mentioned, and also Mathews (1897) and Enright (1901). Tindale did not take account of Mathews' familiarity with Curr or the fact that Mathews' Wannarawa<sup>108</sup> was little more than a restatement of Miller with an inflected spelling. Tindale was also probably unaware that Mathews was in correspondence with Fawcett<sup>109</sup> prior to Fawcett's 1897 article. As for Enright's source on Wonnaruah, his article follows Fawcett's Wonnaruah article in the same journal.<sup>110</sup> Familiarity with Fawcett suggests his source, but like Fawcett, Enright at this time was also relying heavily on 'his friend' Mathews for assistance.<sup>111</sup>

What has occurred is that multiple citation of an original source (that in itself is questionable) appears to substantiate a number of 'independent' sources to become 'fact'.

The origin of Wonnarua is obscure but remarkably like an error of the Officer Period and the Wangal. Threlkeld (writing prior to Miller) used Won in respect to the whereabouts of place; for example, Wontaring meaning 'To what place?' Miller, who spent only a few years in the Hunter, may have relied on early Threlkeld. The words won (where?) and unnoa (that?) constructs terms like Won-unnoa (where that?). The question 'Where is your land?' may well have elicited a translation of the question remarkably like Wonnaruah.<sup>112</sup> Wafer and Lissarrague<sup>113</sup> in discussing the language of the Wonnaruah, which they call Wannungine (following Mathews), suggest an etymology linking the name to wanang, meaning which way or which place, which again sounds like a translation of a question regarding place and origin. Wonnaruah on this basis should be treated with caution as an invention, however accidental.

Obviously the opportunity for invention in the period was considerable, with authors offering personal spellings for ‘tribal’ names (much in vogue during the late Victorian period) as well as outright fabrication. The most blatant was John Fraser.

### **John Fraser: ‘the dialect which I have called Awabakal’ and the Kúriġgai tribe**

Fraser<sup>114</sup> gained fame by winning the 1882 Royal Society of NSW Prize for his paper on *The Aborigines of NSW*,<sup>115</sup> but his real reputation came from republishing and editing Threlkeld’s work in 1892 as *An Australian language as spoken by the Awabakal, the people of Awaba or Lake Macquarie*.<sup>116</sup> Threlkeld, as previously emphasised, never gave his missionary subjects or their language any particular name, but the prominence of Awabakal, in what was supposedly Threlkeld’s republished work, was decidedly misleading. Fraser openly named Threlkeld’s Australian language ‘the dialect ... I have called Awabakal’ and suggested this Awabakal language was also the language of Sydney and of one great tribe, the Kúriġgai.<sup>117</sup>

Fraser was breathtaking in his inventiveness. Kuringgai was based on Koori (man) because, as Fraser observed ‘aborigines, in many parts of the world, call themselves “the men”’. In this Fraser offers not only his own spelling for Kuri, but updates Boydell’s Gringai. He also recognised the practice of naming tribes based on the word for ‘no’ and admitted the ‘names Murrinjari, Wachigari, Paikalyung, Yakkajari, I have made; for these tribes have no general name for themselves’. The Wachi-gari and Yakka-jari were also ‘legitimate formations from the local words for “no”’.<sup>118</sup>

The origin of the term Awaba, however, is obscure.<sup>119</sup> Fraser, in his 1892 edited version of Threlkeld, lists under ‘Geographic Names’: ‘Awaba, Lake Macquarie: the word means “a plain surface”’,<sup>120</sup> but Threlkeld never mentions Awaba as a place name for Lake Macquarie. Instead he mentions ‘Nikkin – from Nik-kin, Coal, a place of coals’.<sup>121</sup>

Fraser embellished Threlkeld to an extraordinary degree but because it has been Fraser’s version that has tended to prevail, Threlkeld has been thought to be the author of Fraser’s inventions. This can be seen in Howitt, who published his own encyclopaedic work in 1904, the same year Fraser died. Howitt showed Fraser’s contamination when he described the people of Lake Macquarie as ‘Awabakal, whose language is recorded in the interesting treatises of the Rev L. E. Threlkeld’.<sup>122</sup>

### **R. H. Mathews: the Darkinung and Dharrook**

R. H. Mathews published more than 170 papers<sup>123</sup> in a large range of foreign publications at a time when there was enormous international interest in the Australian Aborigines. His papers on traditional life and language are invaluable,

although he had his critics among rival anthropologists like Howitt, Fison and Spencer who questioned his methodology. More recent writers like Barwick<sup>124</sup> claimed he was a plagiarist and fraud, although Thomas<sup>125</sup> suggests there was no evidence 'he invented or pirated data'. Mathews was extremely secretive and reluctant to disclose sources, and although Thomas suggests the reason was his respect for informants, 'lest his rivals ... track them down',<sup>126</sup> this is an inadequate defence.

Mathews, today, is recognised for introducing the names of the Dharrook, the Darkinung and the Gundungurra into the vocabulary of tribal entities and these are now widely accepted as gospel by students and authors of Aboriginal studies.<sup>127</sup> It seems reasonable, however, to question why no-one had noticed these 'tribes' previously and if they were so important, why they were not mentioned by officers of the First Fleet, by settlers, or by Aborigines nominating 'tribal' groups for the blanket returns of the mid-1800s.

### **Darkinung**<sup>128</sup>

The Darkinung, according to Mathews, extended from Newcastle to Sydney, 'from Wiseman's Ferry, on the Hawkesbury River, to Jerry's Plains and Singleton on the Hunter'.<sup>129</sup> It was a considerable range roughly coinciding with Threlkeld's un-named language group and descriptions of Geawe-gal country.

The origin of Darkinung is obscure, although a possibility lies in Mathews' purported neighbouring Gundungurra language, where the plural of 'man', Bow'wil, is given as darh'gang, meaning, in essence, 'a whole lot of them'.<sup>130</sup> Caution needs to be accorded, however, because it is unlikely Mathews, which Thomas accepts,<sup>131</sup> could speak fluently all, if any, of the numerous languages he writes about and it is uncertain whether he was describing different languages or simply dialectic variation.<sup>132</sup>

If an origin resides in Mathews' language list, however, then Darkinung appears, as is frequently the case in matters of naming, to revolve around manhood initiation. Mathews' informants were Joe Gooburra and Charley Clarke from Sackville Reach Mission on the Hawkesbury,<sup>133</sup> from whom 'I obtained the particulars' of initiation ceremonies they had gone through in their youth.<sup>134</sup> It is probable they were making a group reference to the initiated men, as Darkinung (or Dyargang or Darh'gang), as 'all of the men', in the same way Gringai or Kuringgai suggests 'belonging to the initiated men'.<sup>135</sup> Probably the term should be seen in that context and not some tribal entity, since wherever Aboriginal group naming is made using the word for 'man', it tends to be done in a religious and ceremonial context, referring to lawfully initiated men.

**Dharrook**<sup>13</sup>

Today a large number of Aboriginal people in the Sydney region refer to themselves as descendents of the Dharrook (although there is a preference for Tindale's spelling of Darug) and claim traditional ownership of the Sydney region. James Kohen suggests the word meant 'yam' but also 'teeth' in the Darug language.<sup>137</sup> This idea of being yam people is said to be supported by the fact the Hawkesbury people lived on the yams which grew along the river banks. This explanation has been exceedingly influential and has appeared regularly in respected writings.<sup>138</sup>

Mathews, who coined the name Dharrook, included in his 1901 vocabulary list words for both 'yam' (*midiñ*), and for 'teeth' (*yirra*).<sup>139</sup> Had the words 'yam' and 'teeth' been the source of the name Dharrook, it is strange Mathews did not include the fact, or at least include these names in his Dharrook wordlist. Jakelin Troy suggests that while 'Dharug' has been 'used by linguists since the early twentieth century' to label the Sydney language, 'no provenance has ever been given to the word nor is a meaning ever attributed to "Dharug" beyond it being the name of a language'. In fact there is 'no evidence' for the 'name having been used by the language's speakers as the label for their language'.<sup>140</sup>

Again, however, the name may derive from identifiers related to initiation. Around the initiation circle, trees were branded with secret markings made with a *baibai* or stone axe.<sup>141</sup> These 'curious markings', Mathews suggested, were 'called dharrook or dharrong by the natives' and the 'dharrong extended from near the butts of the trees to an altitude varying from 6 feet to 22 feet up the bole or trunk'.<sup>142</sup> Mathews was seen as a trusted fellow-initiated man so when he asked his informants, both initiated men,<sup>143</sup> how they referred to themselves, their answer may well have been, 'Dharrook', the initiated men who made the secret and sacred marks.

The word reaches into the many layers of initiation. It was Dharamulun, son of the creator Biaime, and a figure of fear and terror, who made boys into men at the secret initiation ceremonies. Dhurra,<sup>144</sup> the word for 'thigh', relates to the initial part of the name of Dharamulun, for he is also known in the initiation secrets as the man with one thigh or leg. The tree trunks are the 'thigh' upon which the sacred marks, dharrook, are inscribed, which further embellishes Dharamulun's secret name.

Even the stone axe, which incises the sacred markings, participates in this elaboration. The livelihood of the inland people depended on the stone axe to cut feet and hand holds in trees to reach the possums, a central part of the diet. The 'handle' of the stone tomahawk in Enright's Kutthung word list is *Tur'-roo-kâ* or Dharrooka, derived also from *Dhur-ra*, the word for leg or thigh.<sup>145</sup> The 'handle' becomes potent symbolism of the power enshrined in the trees, the path by which

Dharamulun travels between the sky and the earth, but also the source of their survival. And so the sacred metaphors extend. Even the voice and trapped spirit of Dharamulun, experienced at the initiation ceremonies, is freed by swinging a piece of wood on a string – the bullroarer.

While no explanation is conclusive, it again appears the name Dharrook, introduced by Mathews, is related to the naming of initiated men and not specifically to a ‘tribe’.

### **Period of Present Construction**

In reviewing the construction of Aboriginal ‘tribal’ entities in the greater Sydney region, a pattern emerges of misunderstanding, imposition and invention, although rarely with an intention to deliberately deceive and often with a genuine desire to affirm the peoples described. It has been nonetheless an imperial imposition.

Because the material evidence is so fraught, it is impossible to make any statement with unalloyed certainty. This paper is intended to provoke, not contribute to a new orthodoxy, for nothing written before or since is without challenge. Unfortunately, instead of infusing investigators with caution, the absence of evidence in the past has been an invitation for declarative certainty and occasional invention.

It is, though, important to the Aboriginal cultural custodians of the present to seek affirmation in the past so the present can be lived with pride of purpose. That requires an understanding of the inadequacy of past investigation and not the repetition of its methodology.

Unfortunately there is a tendency for the habit of invention and construction to persist into present scholarship even where the desire is to affirm the voiceless Aboriginal entities of the past.

Smith,<sup>146</sup> for instance, has adopted, with novel spelling, the name Biyal-Biyal as the name of the Sydney language and Steele<sup>147</sup> has followed suit. The basis of this is a report of Archibald Meston, Protector of Aborigines in southern Queensland after a visit to Aborigines in the Narrabeen Lakes area of Sydney in 1872. He stated that the Aborigines were ‘not speaking the old Beeahlba dialect of Sydney blacks’ but seemed to know ‘more Kamilaroi and the Awaba’.<sup>148</sup> The inference is that Meston was writing in 1872 but the quote is from among a jumble of cuttings and correspondence in a scrapbook kept by Meston and continued by his son Leo. Meston is obviously displaying the influence of Fraser’s 1892 work, where Awabakal is first coined and where he invents a number of tribes based on ‘no’. Meston has used this to invent his own name for the Sydney language (along with another novel spelling) based on beecal for ‘no’, and was obviously writing well after the 1872 Narrabeen encounter. It is not a source to be relied upon, yet it again risks entering orthodox usage.

A similar difficulty arises with the linguistic program to salvage Aboriginal languages in an attempt to valorise Aboriginal culture. Wafer and Lissarrague have contributed much in this area and even assigned copyright to Indigenous groups as a sign of respect. The problem, however, is that it is not only a reconstruction – and thus far from a neutral collation – it also sets in concrete many of the ‘tribal’ constructs discussed in this paper. The risk of inventing tradition as described by Hobsbawn and Ranger<sup>149</sup> is obviously not new but it seems to be emerging in a more sophisticated form – and once again with the imprimatur of white academics and enthusiasts.

The insistence on Darug as a tribal identifier in Sydney, for instance, which has had the support of academics like James Kohen, presents no difficulty so long as origins are understood. Construction of Indigenous identity has always been part of the dynamic of culture even before British occupation. The difficulty arises when constructs enter the academic arena without explanation and with assumed authority.<sup>150</sup>

For instance, in the entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, a source seen with certainty by researchers, the entry on the early Aboriginal warrior, Musquito, suggests he ‘was probably an Eora (Gai-Mariagal) man, born on the north shore of Port Jackson’.<sup>151</sup> It is suggested this information is based on personal communication with one of Musquito’s descendants<sup>152</sup> and cites Sydney Aboriginal academic, Dennis Foley. Gai-Mariagal, which is nowhere in the literature, appears a reconstruction by Foley of the Cammeragal, and while he offers a spirited defence of Aboriginal oral history as a ‘substantiation of Indigenous epistemologies’,<sup>153</sup> the term derives more from early confusion by British officers than family history reaching back to early times. Further it would seem to contradict the claim by Phillip, Musquito’s brother, when requesting his return from banishment, that Musquito was a member of the Broken Bay tribe.<sup>154</sup>

The fact that he writes as an Aboriginal does not prevent Foley’s work occasionally embodying all the conflated confusion of ‘tribal’ entities constructed by European observers over the last 200 years. Writing of the significance of the Homebush area of Sydney, he alludes to the occasional great gatherings of the ‘Eora, the Gundungurra, the Dharawal clans, the Darug (or as we say, Dharruk), the Kuringgai, the Awabagal, the Darkinjung’,<sup>155</sup> which is also a comprehensive gathering of constructs.

And while names may be matters of legitimate conjecture, ethnographic construction seems to unreasonably extend the provenance of family oral history. Foley, in ‘The Last Gai-Marigal Stone Foundations at Port Jackson’,<sup>156</sup> offers a vivid account of permanent dome-shaped houses 5-6 metres long, housing eight to 10 people, covered in branches, leaves and matted reeds and lined with ferns and grasses. Soldiers, he suggests, torched these structures after the ‘deliberate’ spread of smallpox among the Aboriginal people.



The fact that this article appeared in a reputable academic publication endorses its credibility. Unfortunately, Foley offers no substantiating sources and no evidence either from archaeology or the historical records. Yet media and public attention was 'challenged' by this startling new account that questioned 'the commonly held view' that Australia's Aboriginal people 'had no interest in building sophisticated houses or towns'.<sup>157</sup> And herein lies the problem. Why Aborigines, who had an exquisite sense of adequacy and sufficiency, would construct such dwellings, when they had a surfeit of sandstone apartments in the caves about Sydney, is difficult to fathom. The need seems to be to imply some sort of cultural 'sophistication' where none is necessary to validate the culture.

The difficulty presented by such excursions into the imagination, however well meaning and sincerely felt, is that they lend evidence to the efforts of commentators like Windschuttle and discredit not only those who toil in the field but Aboriginal people themselves, by diminishing the worth of Indigenous history.

It is important to chart the European effort to understand Indigenous culture and to recognise the error, misunderstanding and invention that plagued their efforts. In dissecting the past, even in its errors, there is a story of historical worth to be told, one more revealing than simply a catalogue of construction, for within it there are valuable glimpses of the people and culture so misrepresented and misunderstood.

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## Notes

1 Keith Windschuttle, 'Submission to Ms Ruth Ashe, National Museum of Australia Review secretariat Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, March 3 2003'. <http://www.sydneyline.com/National%20Museum%20submission.htm>. Accessed April 2009.

2 Norman Tindale, *The Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, Berkeley, 1974, p. 156.

3 Windschuttle, 'Submission to Ms Ruth Ashe'.

4. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, see under tribal heading: Wiradjuri (NSW). Reverend Richard Taylor visited the Wellington Valley from 3-7 November 1838, see [<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/group/amrhd/wvp/appendices/028.html>].

5 George Augustus Robinson (ed Ian Clark), *The Papers of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, vol. 2: Aboriginal Vocabularies: South Eastern Australia, 1839-1852*, Melbourne, 2000, p. 177. Robinson collected a wordlist from a group near Gundagai named 'Wayradjerre'.

6 L. E. Threlkeld (re-arranged, condensed and edited with an appendix by John Fraser), *An Australian language as spoken by the Awabakal, the people of Awaba or Lake Macquarie (near Newcastle, New South Wales) being an account of their language, traditions and customs*, Sydney, 1892 (hereafter abbreviated to Fraser, *An Australian Language*). In notes relating to his own *Map of New South Wales as occupied by the Native Tribes*, in the frontispiece under the heading 'The Illustrations'.

7 'Country', the place of birth and origin, has always been a significant aspect of *personal* Indigenous identity, but it is not to be conflated with notions of 'tribe' or even clan identity.

8 See Nicolas Peterson (ed), *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia*, Canberra, 1976, Introduction pp. 1-11, for a useful discussion of this controversial term.

9 No term adequately captures the essence of Aboriginal coalescence and connection. Tribe, clan, band and even 'horde' has been applied, though, oddly, the commonly adopted Aboriginal appellation of 'mob' is probably the most appropriate as it is suitably amorphous, encompassing, and lacking familiar hierarchies. Its pejorative origins in the 17th century definition of rabble, the *mobile vulgus*, the moving mass of common folk, makes it a fitting descriptor – with sufficient residual menace to satisfy modern Aboriginal political intent.

10 Anne Ross, 'Tribal and linguistic boundaries: A reassessment of the evidence', in G. Aplin, (ed.), *Sydney Before Macquarie: A Difficult Infant*, Sydney, 2005, p. 49. Similar observations are made by J. Kohen and R. J. Lampert, 'Hunters and Fishers of the Sydney Region', in D. J. Mulvaney and J. P. White (eds), *Australians to 1788*, Sydney, 1987, p. 70.

11 Craig Mear, 'The origin of the smallpox outbreak in Sydney in 1789', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 94, pt 1, June 2008.

12 J. Kohen and R. J. Lampert, 'Hunters and Fishers of the Sydney Region', in D. J. Mulvaney and J. P. White (eds), *Australians to 1788*, Sydney, 1987, p. 70.

13 While evidence from the time is fragmentary, the capacity of Aboriginal groups to reinvent themselves can be observed elsewhere. Because of rapid depopulation in the 1920s, elders of mobs around Cairns and Murray Upper, near Tully, consciously created macro groupings that cut across traditional boundaries and even language groups. They went so far as to deliberately alter traditional marriage arrangements, usually an area of rigid consistency. This capacity for Aboriginal reorganisation contradicts assumptions of traditional inflexibility. See R. M. W. Dixon, 'Tribes, Languages and Other Boundaries in North-east Queensland', in N. Peterson (ed.), *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia*, Canberra, 1976, p. 219.

14 Judith Campbell, *Invisible Invaders: smallpox and other diseases in Aboriginal Australia 1780-1880*, Melbourne, 2002, pp. 39-50.

15 Ross, 'Tribal and Linguistic Boundaries', p. 52.

16 A. Capell, 'Aboriginal Languages in the South Central Coast, New South Wales: fresh discoveries', *Oceania*, vol. 41, 1970.

17 G. Poiner, 'The Process of the Year', unpublished, BA (Hons) thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, 1971.

18 Val Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past – investigating the archaeological and historical records*, Sydney, 2002 and 2010, chapter 3.

19 Keith Vincent Smith, *Eora Clans: a history of Indigenous social organisation in Coastal Sydney, 1770-1890*, unpublished MA thesis, Macquarie University, 2004. Also Keith Vincent Smith, *Bennelong: the coming in of the Eora to Sydney Cove 1788-1792*, Sydney, 2001.

20 Watkin Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years: Being a reprint of a Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and a Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*, Introduction and annotations by L. F. Fitzhardinge, New Edition 1979 (original publication as two books 1789 and 1793), p. 231.

21 L. E. Threlkeld, *An Australian grammar: comprehending the principles and natural rules of the language, as spoken by the Aborigines in the vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, &c. New South Wales*, Sydney, 1834, introductory remarks. p. xi. Threlkeld recorded Be-el, 'to mock', as in 'Be-el-mul-li-ko: to mock, to make sport, to deride' (p. 96). Fraser later added further words about 'mocking' from Béel when he published Threlkeld's unfinished Lexicon of 1858 (Fraser, *An Australian Language*, p. 202).

22 W. J. Enright, 'Notes on the Aborigines of the North Coast of NSW', *Mankind*, vol. 5, no. 9, October 1940, pp. 321-322.

23 Robert Dawson, *The Present State of Australia: a Description of the Country, Its Advantages and Prospects with Reference to Emigration; and a Particular Account of its Aboriginal Inhabitants*, London, 1830, p. 336.

24 Amanda Lissarrague, *A Salvage Grammar and Wordlist of language from the Hunter River and Lake Macquarie*, Nambucca Heads, 2006, p. 132.

25 Even William Dawes, whose connection with the people was more intimate, made confusions repeated by others.

26 Phillip to Sydney, 13 February 1790, *Historical Records of Australia*, series I, vol. I, 1914, pp. 159-161.

27 Phillip to Sydney, *HRA*, pp. 159-161.

28 Jakelin Troy, *The Sydney language*, Canberra, 1993, pp. 14-15.

29 Phillip, Hunter and Collins, *Vocabulary of the language of N.S.Wales in the neighbourhood of Sydney. (Native and English but not alphabetical). C1790-1792*, Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, ms 41645, copy Mitchell Library.

30 William Dawes, Manuscript of c1790-1792; School of Oriental and African Studies, ref ms 41645b (Mitchell Library, microfilm). Dawes also suggests beal as 'no' but it is difficult to know, even at that early stage, if this is correct or merely Aborigines going along with what the British understood as correct.

31 In Keith Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, Sydney, 2001, p. vii. Smith suggests Wangal derived from wanne meaning west although without attribution.

32 Collins, 1804, p. 553. The electronic version of Collins suggests wan which, while appearing to confirm the proposed thesis, is a likely scanning error and is actually wau for where? Hunter, who borrowed from Collins, suggested waré and wa. These appear, however, suspiciously like Aboriginal mimicry of the English where? that then rapidly entered the NSW pidgin. Dawes' invaluable study contains words, usually unfamiliar terms like sugar, that rapidly entered Aboriginal speech. The pressing need to construct a mutually intelligible tongue meant that other 'Aborenglish' terms that are difficult to detect inevitably crept in.

33 L. E. Threlkeld, *Specimens of a dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1827. Similar examples are in E. M. Curr's *The Australian Race*, Melbourne, 1887, where Tuckerman, J., Esq. (p. 359), says 'Where are the Blacks?' is wirri koori? and Bench of Magistrates at Wingham (p. 351) say 'Where are the Blacks?' is wanna koori? Mathews, in *Languages of the Kamilaroi and other aboriginal tribes of New South Wales*, London, 1903, p. 274, noted 'where?' as wang? in Darkinung and 'where from?' as wanberrung.

34 Threlkeld, *An Australian grammar*, introductory remarks, p. ix.

35 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, in vol. 1, appendix I, Government and Religion, pp. 352-353.

36 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, vol. 1, appendix VI, p. 373.

37 Philip Gidley King, *Journal of Philip Gidley King*, Mitchell Library, Sydney, April 1790, p. 405. Bennelong was also called Wolarewarre. Note too that in King the Cammerragal are now geographically inland, not on the North Shore.

38 Hale in Charles Wilkes, 1846, *United States Exploring Expedition*, Philadelphia, vol. VI, *Ethnology and Philology*, by Horatio Hale (p. 483), also suggests *a* and *u*, *e* and *i*, and *o* and *u* were interchangeable with some dialects effecting the first and others the second variation.

39 A. W. Howitt, *The native tribes of south-east Australia*, Canberra, facsimile of 1904 edition, 2001, p. 314. Note: The Yuin accepted Howitt as Gommera. (Howitt, p. 561) and he participated in (and probably instigated) the organisation of one of the last initiation ceremonies.

40 Howitt, pp. 462 and 518. Also Hale in Charles Wilkes, 1846, *United States Exploring Expedition*, Philadelphia, vol. VI, *Ethnology and Philology*, by Horatio Hale, pp. 502, 512.

41 Keith Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, Sydney, 2001, p. ix.

42 Kohen and Lampert, 'Hunters and Fishers in the Sydney region', p. 462, note 351.

43 James L. Kohen, *Daruganora: Darug Country – the place and the people*, Sydney, 2006, maps.

44 Howitt, p. 303.

45 Mathews' 1904 word list in 'The Wiradyuri and Other Languages of New South Wales', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 34, July-December 1904, describes bidyar as 'old man' and the missionary Günther is reported in Fraser, *An Australian Language* (p. 73) contributing the Wiradjuri words bidyur around 1838 meaning any male and *bidyur* meaning 'pointing up, very high', a possible reference to being in touch with the Sky Hero. This odd conjunction seems to reside in religious taboo. K. Langloh Parker, *The Eurhlayi Tribe, a study of Aboriginal life in Australia*, c.1900, in chapter 2, explained that Byamee meant 'great one' in the sense of the 'All Father' but was unable to be used by women and the uninitiated. The word Boyjerh meaning 'father' was used instead, which appears an alternate spelling of Bidyar. In Curr (1886), Bucknell records Boyd-jurt for 'father' on the Gwyder (p. 312). Enright in 1900 writes Bee-yar for 'father' at Port Stephens.

46 King had referred to the Gomerrigal-Tongara, where Tongara or Tuggara meant the inland or Woods people (*Journal of P. G. King*, p. 405).

47 Collins, p. 288.

48 William Dawes, Manuscript of c. 1790-1792, School of Oriental and African Studies, ref ms 41645b (Mitchell Library, microfilm).

49 Collins, *An Account*, vol. 1, chapter XXIX, p. 304. By the late 1830s the annual blanket returns record the 'tribe' of a family living on the Hawkesbury as Wiradjuri. This is spelled differently in different returns: 1837, Warrawarry; 1839, Werwerarry; 1840, Worwerawy (Parramatta Blanket Returns: Colonial Secretary; AONSW: 1837 – 4/1133.3; 1839 – 4/2433.1; 1840 – 4/2479.1). Whether Wiradjuri were resident on the Hawkesbury prior to the British is unknown but a 'blended' language where the Wiradjuri 'worri' for 'no' is recorded, seemed to have emerged at some later stage. (See E. M. Curr (Tuckerman, J., Esq.) in *The Australian Race*, Melbourne, 1887, 'No. 189 – Hawkesbury River and Broken Bay, pp. 359-360.)

50 Dawes	eora	black men	1790
Hunter	Eo-ra	Men or People	1790
Hunter	Yo-ra	a number of people	1790
Collins	Eo-ra	a common name for natives	1790
Oldfield	Koray	Man	1828
Threlkeld	Ko-re	Man or Mankind	1834
Scott	Cooree	blackfellow	1850
Mathews	Kuri	man	1903

Dawes, *Manuscript of 1790-1792*; Hunter word list; Collins wordlist; Ascribed to Oldfield in Gunson, p. 356; Threlkeld, *An Australian Grammar*, 1834, p. 87; Scott wordlist p. 36 in Bennett.

51 Val Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past*, Sydney, 2002, 2010, pp. 35-6.

52 G. Bennett, *The Port Stephens Blacks: Recollections of William Scott*, Dungog, 1929. It is possible, though, that the word Kuri was voiced initially as an Aboriginal Ng, a peculiar sound, like putting a u before it, as in ung, which would explain the 'g' in Scott's Gri. See R. H. Mathews, 'Languages of the Kamilaroi and other Aboriginal tribes of New South Wales', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1903, p. 260. Mathews used this orthography in other papers explaining the Aboriginal 'Ng' pronunciation.

53 Reference to Boydell, in Diary by Mary Phoebe Broughton ML, ms 4010 (married to Boydell). Also Charles Boydell, *Journal Transcript*, Mitchell Library. Fraser refers to Boydell who wrote

to him and these letters are sources he passed on to Howitt (p. x), preface. Also Howitt, Box 1050/1, *Correspondence and notes concerning tribes*, (d) Gwewegal and Gringai tribe: John Fraser to AW Howitt – Enclosure three letters James Boydell to John Fraser, 25 April 1882, in MF154 A. W. Howitt, AIATSIS Library, Canberra.

54 John Fraser, 'The Aborigines of NSW', in *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1882*, vol. XVI, Sydney, 1883, p. 199.

55 A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Sydney, 1938, p. 26.

56 See G. A. Wood, 'Exploration under Governor Phillip', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society* 1926, 12, pp. 1-26.

57 Tench, April 1791, p. 225.

58 Ross, 'Tribal and Linguistic Boundaries', p. 49.

59 Tench, April 1791, p. 225. This wonderfully Eurocentric view is oblivious to the fact that bush excursions were a way of life, not 'boy scout' adventures for the Aborigines.

60 W. J. Enright, 'The Language, Weapons and Manufactures of the Aborigines of Port Stephens, NSW', *Journal of the Royal Society, NSW*, XXXIII., pp. 104,109.

61 David Wilkins and David Nash, 'The European Discovery of a Multilingual Australia', in William McGregor (ed), *Encountering Aboriginal Languages*, Canberra, 2008, pp. 485-507. Wilkins and Nash suggest 'people associated with the Grey Kangaroo' but also acknowledge the suggestion by Ray Woods (2005) in an anthropological assessment of experts evidence to the Federal Court [NG6004/98], that it could refer to a place name.

62 Tench, April 1791, p. 292.

63 Threlkeld, *An Australian grammar*, "'Kut-tai", The site of Sydney lighthouse; any Peninsula', p. 82. Enright, for instance, wrote of the Kutthung around Port Stephens and Howitt wrote of the coastal Katung to the south.

64 Ross, 'Tribal Languages and Linguistic Boundaries' (p. 51), citing Phillip to Banks (1791).

65 Tench, April 1791, p. 230.

66 William Dawes, Manuscript of c. 1790-1792, School of Oriental and African Studies, ref ms 41645b (Mitchell Library, microfilm). Also online at <http://www.hrelp.org/dawes/>

67 Kohen and Lampert, 'Hunters and Fishers'. Also J. Kohen, 'Prehistoric Settlement in the Western Cumberland Plain: resources, environment and technology', unpublished PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 1986.

68 Capell, 'Aboriginal languages', *Oceania*, vol. 41, 1970.

69 Wilkins and Nash, 'European "discovery" of a multilingual Australia', p. 501.

70 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, p. 122.

71 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, p. 351.

72 P. O'Shaughnessy (ed), *A Rum Story: The Adventures of Joseph Holt – Thirteen Years in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1988, p. 70. On one side there was the Sydney tribe, Field of Mars tribe, Northern Boundary tribe, Georges River tribe and Cabramatta tribe. They would join, in time of battle, the surrounding and outlying Cow Pastures tribe, Hawkesbury tribe, Broken Bay tribe and Seven Hills tribe.

73 Although Mahroot's age is uncertain, he was probably born around 1800 and showed no signs of initiation, so by puberty (c. 1810-1815) initiation in the Sydney area had virtually ceased, such was the level and haste of cultural implosion.

74 'Testimony by Mahroot alias the Boatswain', in 'Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Select Committee on the Aborigines', from *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council New South Wales*, Sydney, 1845, pp. 943-47.

75 Mahroot's evidence was late in the piece and may, of course, indicate as much the speed with which 'tribal' entities disappeared as it does the relative unimportance of such names.

76 N. Gunson (ed), *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L. E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines, 1824-1859*, vol. 1, Canberra, 1974, p. 4, citing original W. Walker to Watson, Parramatta, 15 November 1821, ML, BTM, Box 52, p. 998. The Broken Bay tribe under Bungaree, the Cowpastures tribe under Boodberrie and the supposedly savage Five Islands tribe.

77 Gunson, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 337.

78 Threlkeld was responsible for: *Specimens of a Dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales; being the First Attempt to Form their Speech into a Written Language* (1827); *An Australian Grammar, Comprehending the Principles and Natural Rules of the Language, as Spoken by the Aborigines, in the Vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, &c. New South Wales* (1834); *An Australian Spelling Book, in the Language as Spoken by the Aborigines, in the Vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, New South Wales* (1836); *A Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language* (1850).

79 Gunson, vol. II, p. 350.

80 Gunson, vol. II, p. 113. Although his birth date is unknown we know from the 1819 painting of 'Biraban/Magill' by Richard Brown that he had the scars of an initiated adult, so he was probably born in the late 1700s. Biraban was raised in the military barracks at Sydney, where under the name Johnny MacGill he learnt to speak what was said to be very fair English.

81 *Committee on the Aborigine Question*, 1838. *Minutes of Evidence*: The Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld examination, Friday 21 September 1838. Threlkeld's statement of the language change south of Sydney endorses the boundary between the Yurin/Kuric language groups, as well as the artistic and culture boundary evident in the archaeology. See J. Mulvaney and J. Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, Sydney, 1999, pp. 373-380.

82 Robert Dawson, *The Present State of Australia; a Description of the Country, its Advantages and Prospects with Reference to Emigration: and a Particular Account of its Aboriginal Inhabitants*, London, 1830, 2nd edition, p. 336.

83 Collins, while a sympathetic observer, assumed a considerable variation in dialect within a day's walk and tabulated the differences, particularly between Sydney and the Hawkesbury. See Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, vol. 1, chapter XXIX, p. 557.

84 R. M. W. Dixon, 'Tribes, Languages and other Boundaries in north-east Queensland', in Nicholas Peterson (ed), *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia*, Canberra, 1976, pp. 231-32.

85 L. E. Threlkeld, *Specimens of a dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales; Being the first attempt to form their speech into a written language*, Sydney, 1827, preface.

86 Kamilaroi	Head	Koga	Mathews	1903
Hawkesbury	Head	Co-co	Collins	1798
Thurrawal	Head	Wollar	Mathews	1903
Lake Macquarie	Head	Woll-ung	Threlkeld	1827
Sydney	Head	Ca-ber-ra	Collins	1798
Hawkesbury	Head	Koh-bah-rah	Threlkeld	1827
Lake Macquarie	Head	Koh-bah-rah	Threlkeld	1827
Sydney	Head	Kābára	Hale	1839
Liverpool	Head	Kābára	Hale	1839

87 L. E. Threlkeld, *An Australian grammar*, introductory remarks, p. ix.

88 W. J. Enright, 'Notes on the Aborigines of the North Coast of N.S.W', *Mankind* 2:9, October 1940, p. 321. Enright was deeply familiar with the work of Threlkeld and Ridley and had worked earlier with both Mathews and Elkin. Like Threlkeld, Enright too believed the various mobs along the coast showed no great variation in language. Hale (p. 479) similarly realised the 'Australians have commonly two or three names for an object' marked by 'slight modifications'.

89 R. M. W. Dixon, 'Tribes, Languages and other Boundaries', p. 224.

90 W. Ridley, excerpts on 'Traditions' from *Kamilarai and other Australian Languages*, Sydney, 1875, p. 163. Names like Duck's Feather, Opossum Cloak, Speared in the Shoulder, an Eagle looking all around, Turtle, and Rain Maker.

91 Fraser, 'Some Remarks on the Australian Languages', p. 235.

92 A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Sydney, 1954, p. 25.

93 C. Wilkes, *United States Exploring Expedition*, during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, vol. VI, *Ethnography and Philology*, by Horatio Hale, Philadelphia, 1846, p. 482. Threlkeld, in his last work (Fraser, 1892) cites vol. II, p. 254 of the *Narrative* to acknowledge Hale's generous thanks for the assistance of Biraban. But he nowhere corrects Hale's use of the term Kāmlarai, but this is probably because, while he had access to the American Expedition's first five volumes, it is unlikely Threlkeld had received the seventh and final volume, *Ethnography and Philology*, wherein Hale published his so-called Kāmlarai language.

94 The problem for Hale was that the word for 'no' (recorded by Threlkeld) was not Kummil but Keawai, (or Geawe). Rusden in 'The Geawe-gal Tribe' (Appendix G, Kamiliroi and Kurnai, Fison and Howitt, Melbourne, 1880) refers to them as the Geawe-gal, which is consistent. The grammar and vocabulary published by Hale in 1845 (following Threlkeld in 1832) which he attributes to the Kamilaroi, is actually that of the Geawa-gal. Tindale, in *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (section on Geawa-gal Tribe), puzzles over this 'unexplained error', but it appears Hale is only repeating misunderstandings of the period.

In 1819 Howe (see A. Macqueen, *Somewhat Perilous: the Journey of Singleton, Parr, Howe, Myles and Blaxland*, 2004, p. 170) mistook native comments about the land of the Coomery Roy laying further ahead as meaning part of the Hunter Valley. The *Australian* newspaper in 1827, in a number of articles beginning 24 August, refers to the Cumnaroy as a district of the Hunter. Breton (*Excursions in NSW*, London, 1833, p. 101), believed the people over the mountains were the Corbon Comleroy (Great Kamilaroi) and the people of the Upper Hunter were Gammon Comleroy ('Gammon' being a pidgin term taken from the old English word for 'false' although Breton thinks it means 'small'). So Hale is simply repeating errors of the time.

95 Fraser, *An Australian language as spoken by the Awabakal*, introduction.

96 One of the catastrophic aspects of inter-racial young was the fact that this offspring tended to lack these vital connections, the kinship sponsorship, which literally made one someone.

97 Fraser, 'The Aborigines of New South Wales', pp. 209-210.

98 A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-east Australia*, London, Macmillan, 1904, p. 561.

99 Enright describes emblems in wood or stone travelling from the Macleay to the Tweed River accompanied by the words of songs. These journeys could last years. Messengers sometimes carried invitations to neighbouring people for the loan of sacred objects for inclusion in the teaching of initiates and sometimes different groups met and imbibed knowledge of practices which would be considered by their various headmen and adopted if they appealed (Enright, 'Notes on the Aborigines', p. 323).

100 Gunson, *Australian reminiscences*, p. 123.

101 Threlkeld, *Specimens of a Dialect*, Missionary Society circular attachment.

102 Howitt, *The Native Tribes*, preface, p. xiii.

103 Edward Micklethwaite Curr (1820-1889), Reverend Dr John Fraser (1834-1904), Alfred William Howitt (1830-1908), Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841-1918) and Walter John Enright (1874-1949). In such a rarefied area of interest they were deeply conscious of each other's endeavours. Curr and later Fraser were studied by all who followed, although Mathews and Howitt largely ignored Fraser and concentrated on a personal loathing and feuding competition that coloured their efforts.

- 104 E. M. Curr, *The Australian Race: Its Origins, Languages, Customs*, Melbourne, 1886-87, 4 volumes. This was compiled from work of friends, squatters and land holders across the country and while ground breaking, it was only as reliable as the observers responding to Curr's request.
- 105 Robert Miller, in E. M. Curr's *The Australian Race*, 'No. 188 – The Hunter River. The Wonnarua Tribe and Language', pp. 352-357. This people lived 'within ten miles of Maitland to the apex of the Liverpool Ranges'. This is Geawe-gal country and Miller's small vocabulary list contains many words similar to those recorded in Threlkeld's language area; for example, 'Kae-one', for 'no', an alternate spelling to 'Keawai' or 'Geawe'.
- 106 J. W. Fawcett, 'Notes on the Customs and Dialect of the Wonnah-Ruah Tribe', *Science*, 23 August, 1898, pp. 152-154; and 21 September, 1898, pp. 180-181. In his article he indicates indebtedness to 'correspondents and friends' for much of the information.
- 107 For instance, the word lists contain the same words but where Miller listed the English word first, Fawcett re-arranged it so the Aboriginal word appeared first. The similarities continue, suitably altered.
- 108 R. H. Mathews, 'Initiation Ceremonies of Australian Tribes', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 37, no. 157, January 1898, p. 68.
- 109 R. H. Mathews, 'Australian Ground and Tree Drawings', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 9, no. 2, February 1896, p. 37.
- 110 W. J. Enright, 'Aboriginal Rock Carvings in the Wollombi District, NSW', *Science*, 21 September 1898, p. 181.
- 111 See W. J. Enright, 'The Initiation Ceremonies of the Aborigines of Port Stephens, N.S.Wales', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*, read on July 5, 1899, p. 115. Also W. J. Enright, 'Languages, Weapons', 1900.
- 112 See Threlkeld, *Australian Grammar*, pp. 26, 105, 107.
- 113 James Wafer and Amanda Lissarrague (eds), *A Handbook of Aboriginal Languages of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory*, Nambucca Heads, 2008, p. 163.
- 114 Born in Scotland, John Fraser, an amateur anthropologist and linguist, migrated to Australia and established Sauchie House, a high school, in about 1861, at West Maitland in the Hunter Valley.
- 115 J. Fraser, 'The Aborigines of NSW', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW for the year 1882*, 16, Sydney, 1883, p. 199. The paper was based on his own research as well as that of others, including C. Naseby of Maitland and J. W. Boydell of Camyrallyn at Gresford. Naseby and Boydell had some 30 years experience between them with the Kamilaroi and Gringai people respectively.
- 116 Fraser included Threlkeld's previously unpublished translation of the Gospel of St Luke. He was not the first to want to republish Threlkeld, who had been working towards this with Sir George Grey, then governor of the Cape Colony, during the 1850s, but Threlkeld died suddenly on 10 October 1859 before the work could proceed.
- 117 Fraser, *An Australian language*, editor's preface.
- 118 Fraser, *An Australian language*. From notes relating to Fraser's own 'Map of New South Wales as occupied by the Native Tribes' in the frontispiece under the heading 'The Illustrations'. Fraser extended Threlkeld's language range, without source or explanation, northwards to the Macleay River and suggested with similar certainty that 'Our author [Threlkeld] did not know that his Awabakal blacks were only a subtribe' (p. 126).
- 119 The term Awaba was known to Threlkeld but never recognised by him. The original 10,000-acre land grant at Lake Macquarie was negotiated in 1825 between the LMS and Surveyor General John Oxley. In original correspondence the grant is referred to as *Yawanba or Reids Mistake*. (Gunson, p. 151 and pp. 291-292). In 1841 the Government used a chart of Lake



Macquarie made by W. Proctor to assist in arguing changes to the 1829 land grant. Written across the 1841 chart are the words 'Awaba or Lake Macquarie' (Gunson, vol. I, pp. 85, 89, 90, 94, 95). The original 1841 Proctor map, as found in the NSW Archives, is probably Fraser's later inspiration for the name *Awaba*.

120 Fraser, *An Australian language*, p. 50.

121 Threlkeld, *An Australian Grammar* (1834), 'Common Places', p. 83. Twenty years later, in his 1854 *Reminiscences* (Gunson, pp. 64, 299) he stated the 'blacks call Lake Macquarie Nik-kin-ba, from Nikkin, Coal, and ba, place of coal'.

122 Howitt, p. 84. Howitt, an assiduous and sympathetic researcher, became an elder among the Wolgal and Yuin. He chose, though, to leave out Fraser's Kuringgai from his 1904 map, instead reverting to the earlier Gringai.

123 Mathews, with no formal training in anthropology, travelled the country as a surveyor, recording Aboriginal culture. A pious Presbyterian, he nevertheless became an initiated man, something he never publicly admitted, though his granddaughter wrote many years after his death that his initiated name was Miranen, meaning 'well liked man'. See J. Mathews, *The opal that turned into fire*, Sydney, 2000, foreword.

124 Diane Barwick, 'Mapping the Past: An Atlas of Victorian Clans 1835-1904, Part 1', *Aboriginal History*, 1984, vol. 8, no. 1-2, p. 102.

125 Martin Thomas (ed), 'Culture in Translation: The anthropological legacy of R. H. Mathews', *Aboriginal History*, monograph 15, Canberra, 2007, p. 34.

126 Thomas, 'Culture in Translation', p. 157.

127 Like others at the time, Mathews was fond of inventing unique spellings of previously published names: Curr's Wonnaruah became Wannerawa and Fraser's Kuringgai, Gooreenggai.

128 Variations in spelling abound: Darkinoong (in 'Darkinoong and Wiradjuri' (notebook no. 7), Notebooks, 1872-1910, Papers of Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841-1918), ms 8006, National Library of Australia; Darkinung (Mathews, 1897); Darkiñung (Mathews, 1903); Darginyung (Capell, 1970), Darkinjang (Tindale, 1974), Darkinyung (Walsh, 1981), Darginung (Turbet, 1989).

129 R. H. Mathews, 'Languages of the Kamilaroi and other Aboriginal tribes of New South Wales', vol. 1, no. XXXV, 1901, p. 271.

130 R. H. Mathews and M. M. Everitt, 'The organisation, language and initiation ceremonies of the Aborigines of the south-east coast of New South Wales', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, 1900, p. 265. In another paper a year later (R. H. Mathews, 'The Gundungurra Language', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 1901, p. 142) Mathews spelled the word differently as 'dyargang'.

131 Thomas, *Culture in Translation*, p. 3.

132 Güther's Wiradjuri word list at Mudgee around 1837 records Dabbarmallang as a 'mob of natives' (Fraser, *An Australian Language*, 1892, part IV, appendix, p. 78). It is probably significant for the construction of Mathews' Darh'gang that he had studied Fraser and Güther's word list.

133 J. Brook, *Shut Out from the World – The Hawkesbury Aborigines Reserve and Mission, 1889-1946*, Sydney, 1994, p. 69.

134 R. H. Mathews, 'The Burbung of the Darkinung Tribes', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, July 1897, vol. X (new series), part 1.

135 Mathews in 'Languages of the Kamilaroi', listed the Darkinung name for 'man' as kuri.

136 Spelling variations abound: Darrook (Mathews, 1897); Dharrook (Mathews, 1898); Dhar'ook (Mathews and Everitt, 1900); Dharruk (Mathews, 1901, 1903); Dharrook (Capell, 1970); Dharuk (Capell, 1970, map1); Darug (Tindale, 1974); Dharug (Kohen and Lampert, 1987).

- 137 Kohen, *Daruganora: Darug Country*, introduction and p. 9.
- 138 For example, see J. Connor, *Australian Frontier Wars 1788-1838*, Sydney, 2001.
- 139 R. H. Mathews, 'The Thurrawal language', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*, vol. XXXV, 1901, p. 157 and p. 159 under 'Vocabulary of Dharruk Words'.
- 140 J. Troy *The Sydney Language*, Canberra, 1993, introduction, p. 9.
- 141 W. J. Enright, 'Further Notes on the Worimi', *Mankind*, August 1933, p. 161.
- 142 R. H. Mathews, 'The Keeparra ceremony of initiation', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, May 1897, p. 323. They were 'cut upon the bark only' of spotted or grey gums with smooth, soft bark.
- 143 By the 1890s only two of Mathews' initiated informants remained alive, Jimmy Lownes at Botany and another on the reserve at the Hawkesbury. See Kohen, *Daruganora: Darug Country*, introduction and p. 31.
- 144 Dhurra = Thigh in Mathews' word list for Kamilaroi (1903); Darkiñung (1903); Dharrook (1901); Thurrawal (1901); Dhurrang (1904); Wiradyuri (1904); Ngunawal (1904). There is reason to question whether these are different 'tribes', or just dialects of the same language.
- 145 W. J. Enright, 'Language, Weapons and Manufactures of the Aborigines of Port Stephens, NSW', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*, vol. XXXIV, 1900, p. 114.
- 146 Keith Vincent Smith, 'Eora Clans: A History of Indigenous social organisation in coastal Sydney, 1770-1890', unpublished MA thesis, Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University, 2004, p. 3.
- 147 Jeremy Macdonald Steele, 'The Aboriginal Language of Sydney: A partial reconstruction of the Indigenous language of Sydney based on the notebooks of William Dawes of 1790-91 informed by other records of the Sydney and surrounding languages to c.1905', unpublished MA thesis, Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University, 2005, p. 5.
- 148 Cited in Keith Vincent Smith, *Biyalba dialect*, Sydney, 2002, and repeated in Steele, p. 7.
- 149 Eric Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1984.
- 150 For a considered discussion on this, see Peter Sutton, 'Myth as History, History as Myth', in Ian Keen (ed), *Being Black: Aboriginal Cultures in 'Settled' Australia*, Canberra, 1988, pp. 251-258.
- 151 Naomi Parry, 'Musquito (c. 1780-1825)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, supplementary volume, Melbourne, 2005, p. 299.
- 152 N. Parry, "'Many deeds of terror": Windschuttle and Musquito', <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lab/85/parry.html>, note 6: 'Descendants of Musquito's family believe he was Gai-Mariagal from Sydney's northern beaches, with important connections to Hawkesbury sites. Personal communication from Dennis Foley, a descendant.'
- 153 Dennis Foley, 'Leadership: the quandary of Aboriginal societies in crises, 1788-1830, and 1966', in I. Macfarlane and M. Hannah (eds), *Transgressions: critical Australian Indigenous histories*, Monograph 16, Canberra, 2007, p. 179.
- 154 NSW Colonial Secretary to Lt Gov Davey, 17 August 1814, AOT CSO 1/177/4306; also NSW State Records Reel 6004, 4/3493:251.
- 155 D. Foley, *The Cultural Genocide of the Sydney Olympic 2000 Games*. <http://www.faira.org.au/lrq/archives/199811/stories/the-cultural-genocide.html>.
- 156 D. Foley, 'The Last Gai-Marigal Stone Foundations at Port Jackson', in P. Memmott, *Gunya Goondie and Wurly: The Aboriginal Architecture of Australia*, Brisbane, 2007, p. 187.
- 157 Paul Bibby, 'Complex designs reveal country's first architects', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 9, 2007, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/complex-designs-reveal-countrys-first-architects/2007/10/08/1191695822471.html>.