



# ABORIGINAL HISTORY OF BURWOOD MUNICIPALITY

BY MICHAEL GUIDER 1997

## INTRODUCTION

This Aboriginal history of Burwood Municipality was compiled in 1997 as a brief document to begin the search for local history into the original inhabitants of the local area. Unfortunately in almost every book of local history the Aboriginal people are lucky to get one or two pages devoted to them, before we move straight into the last 209 years of European history. I've always thought was little strange considering the DARUG tribe whose land included Burwood, has lived in the Sydney area for at least 10,000 years.

I hope that future readers may be able to add to this history via their own research so that the current gap in our knowledge of the Aboriginal occupation of this area may be filled. I would also like to thank Burwood-Drummoyne Library for their assistance especially Susan Campbell, Local History Librarian.

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The Burwood Municipality was once inhabited by the WANGAL clan of the DARUG tribe. However, little remains to remind us of the former Aboriginal occupation of this area now administered by Burwood Council.

The WANGAL clan's country or territory was known as WANNE, and it originally extended from the suburbs of Balmain, Birchgrove and Leichhardt in the east, to Silverwater and Auburn in the west. The northern boundary was the Parramatta river, but the southern boundary is not yet known. Neighbouring DARUG clan's were the CADIGAL to the east, the WALLUMEDEGAL on the northern shore of Parramatta river, the WATEGORA to the west, and the BEDIAGAL to the south-west.

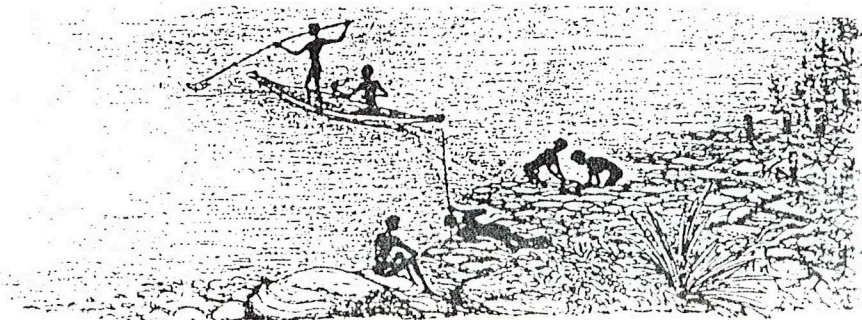
How long the WANGAL clan had lived around Burwood is unknown, but we do know the DARUG tribe were living around the Sydney for at least 10,000 years. Evidence for this was obtained during a recent archaeological excavation in the Darling Mills State Forest, North Rocks. Dr. Val Attenbrow, of The Australian Museum, excavated this DARUG rockshelter, (which was under threat of destruction) during the building of the M2 Tollway.

The earliest recorded made with Aborigines near Burwood, took place on the southern bank of the Parramatta river. This encounter on the 5th February 1788 was noted in the diary of Lieut. William Bradley R.N. thus:

*" At daylight having a guard of marines, proceeded to the upper part of the harbour again, passed several natives in the caves as we went up and some on the shore near the place we left the beads and other things, who followed us along the rocks calling to us. We landed to cook our breakfast on the opposite shore to them. We made signs for them to come over and waved green boughs. Soon after 7 of them came over in 2 canoes and landed near our boats. They left their spears in the canoes and came to us. We tied beads etc. about them and left them our fire to dress mussels which they went about as soon as we put off. "*

The seven Aborigines who crossed over from the opposite shore would have been DARUG tribesmen but we don't know whether they belonged to the WALLUMEDEGAL or WANGAL clan.

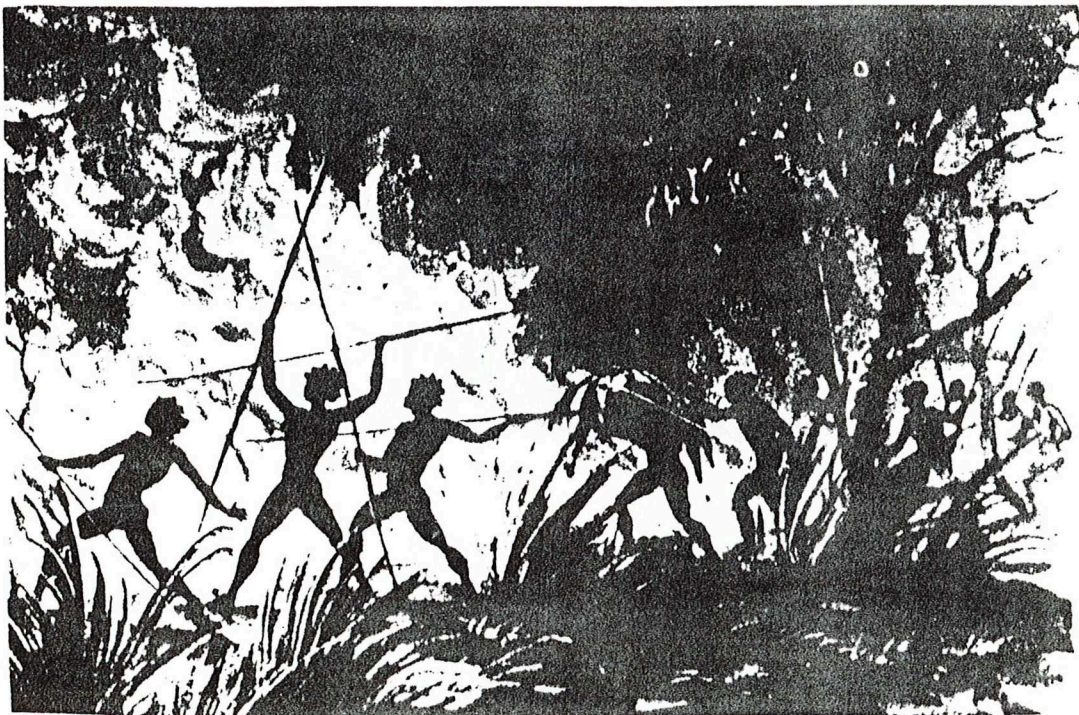
Breakfast Point was known as : Booridiow-o-gule by the WANGAL people.



Being centrally located on the ridge between the Cooks and Parramatta rivers the Burwood municipality was an integral part of the WANGAL clan's territory. The WANGAL people were a coastal clan of the DARUG tribe and during the summer months most of their food was gathered from the estuarine areas of their land. This food consisted mainly of shellfish and fish and the remains of these meals were left behind in shell middens which can still be seen in Cabarita and Rodd Point. During the winter months when fish were scarce, the Aborigines relied more on kangaroos, possums, emus, ducks, reptiles, insects etc, plus a large variety of plant foods.

The Burwood area was also readily accessible to the WANGAL people by canoe via the Cooks and Parramatta rivers or by using the native pathway from Sydney to Parramatta. It is believed Parramatta road was built upon this native pathway which had probably been in use for centuries. As the Burwood municipality has no rock shelters or overhangs suitable for camping, if the WANGAL people did camp in the district then they would have used bark huts or gunyahs. It is more likely that they did not permanently use the municipality for camping purposes but instead frequented the area to gather plant foods and animals.

The Burwood municipality once supported large forests of eucalypt trees with many native grasses growing as an understorey. During kangaroo hunts or (WALBUNGA) as they were called, several clans would band together to form a large circle around their intended quarry. Then they would set fire to the grass, leaving only a narrow opening in the circle for the kangaroos to escape. As the frightened marsupials hopped to freedom the DARUG hunters would spear them. This method would probably have been used in Burwood as the flatter terrain made it much easier to encircle the grazing kangaroos.



The most famous WANGAL warrior was BENNELONG who first came to prominence when he was captured with COLBEE a CADIGAL man, on the orders of Governor Arthur Phillip. This drastic step was taken on the 25th November 1789, so the Governor could learn more about the Aboriginal people, their language and customs.

Bennelong became the only member of the WANGAL clan to travel overseas to England, and he returned 3 years later to tell his people of the wonders he saw there. Bennelong died in 1813 and is buried on private property in Ryde or WALLUMETTA as it was known by the local WALLUMEDEGAL clan who lived there. The exact location of his grave is still disputed by local historians. Normally in Aboriginal society when a person died their name ceased to be used or passed on to another. However, because of Bennelong's remarkable effect on the first settlers his name has lived on and is still used in today's society. Although Bennelong lived a simple existence, living off the land, his name is now associated with such things as :

A luxury house at Bellevue Hill - Chateau Du Benelong, a VIP cruiser MV BENNELONG, several roads and streets in Sydney suburbs, Bennelong Point - home the world famous Sydney Opera House, Bennelong Restaurant, Bennelong electorate and even Benelong column in a Sunday newspaper. There is Bennelong Park in Putney and also at least two books written about his life.

Bennelong also claimed ownership of Goat Island saying his father had given it to him. From ethnographical records we know that Bennelong and his wife Bangaroo often camped there. Bennelong would have travelled through the Burwood Municipality many times with the WANGAL clan.



Bennelong in his  
European clothes.  
Engraving by John  
Neagle, 9.6 x 13.3 cm.  
Rex Nan Kivell  
Collection, National  
Library of Australia

### ABORIGINAL RELICS IN BURWOOD

No relics of the former Aboriginal occupation of Burwood Municipality are visible today. This is due to a combination of geological and environmental factors as well as the early settlement of the area by Europeans. Several different Aboriginal site types would have been likely in this area. These were SCARRED TREES, OPEN CAMPSITES, and possibly BURIALS or AXE GRINDING GROOVES.

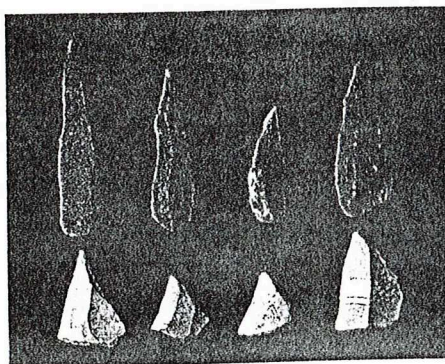
Due to the geology of the area no ROCK ENGRAVINGS or CAVE PAINTINGS have been found. Art sites require a suitable medium to work on such as sandstone rock. There are no large areas of sandstone or rock shelters in the Burwood district. No BURIAL sites have been found either.

SHELL MIDDENS were always located near to the source of supply e.g. the estuarine sections of the Cooks and Parramatta rivers. Burwood municipality incorporates a small section of the northern bank of the Cooks river but the shell middens used by the WANGAL clan all occur outside the municipal boundaries along the southern bank of the Parramatta river.

There are 18,000 known Aboriginal sites in New South Wales, and all are protected by law under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.

While no Aboriginal sites have been recorded in the Burwood Municipality there is always the possibility that one may yet be found. Sites are occasionally found during excavations for building developments, roadworks, park improvements etc. Sometimes ethnographical evidence like old newspapers etc. can restore information presumed lost.

Backed artefacts:  
Bondi points (top) and  
geometric microliths  
(bottom) from coastal  
New South Wales.  
The backing (or work-  
ing) which shapes the  
stone tool is particul-  
arly clear on the  
Bondi point second  
from right; on the  
others it is partially  
hidden. These ex-  
amples show the  
range of shapes typical  
of these artefacts,  
which were made  
only during the last  
5000 years. Photo:  
Australian Museum



Carved tree, near  
Molong, NSW. Trees  
were carved with a  
variety of geometric  
and other designs at  
ceremonial and burial  
sites. This tree marks  
the burial place of

Yuranigh, who acted  
as a guide to Thomas  
Mitchell in his explor-  
ation of western New  
South Wales. Yuranigh  
died in 1840. Photo:  
Reg Morrison, Weldon  
Tramies

ABORIGINAL PLACE NAMES :

No Aboriginal place names have survived in the Burwood municipality however, Burwood Council has given one reserve an Aboriginal name.  
COOINOO RESERVE - Enfield.

ABORIGINAL STREET NAMES :

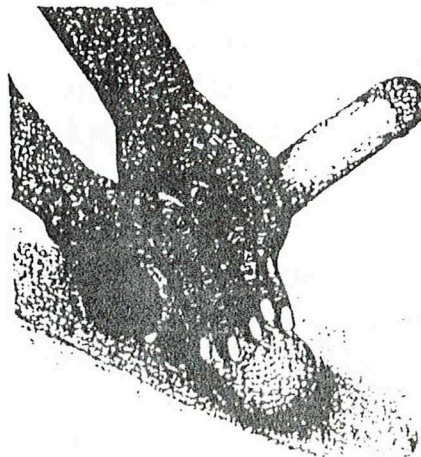
There are several streets in the Burwood municipality which appear to have Aboriginal names. I have listed these in alphabetical order, if any are not Aboriginal in origin I apologise. Nor do I know the meaning of these words however, for those interested I suggest they contact the Burwood Council or the local Historical society. Another source is the book "Aboriginal Place Names" by A.W. Reed.

CARILLA	STREET	PARRAMATTA	STREET	WONGA STREET
COBBITY	STREET	QUANDONG	STREET	WYALONG ST.
EURALLA	STREET	TAHLEE	STREET	YANDARLO ST.
IRRARA	STREET	TANGARRA	STREET	
KEMBLA	STREET	TULLIMBAR	STREET	
MERLYA	STREET	WARATAH	STREET	
MINNA	STREET	WILGA	STREET	

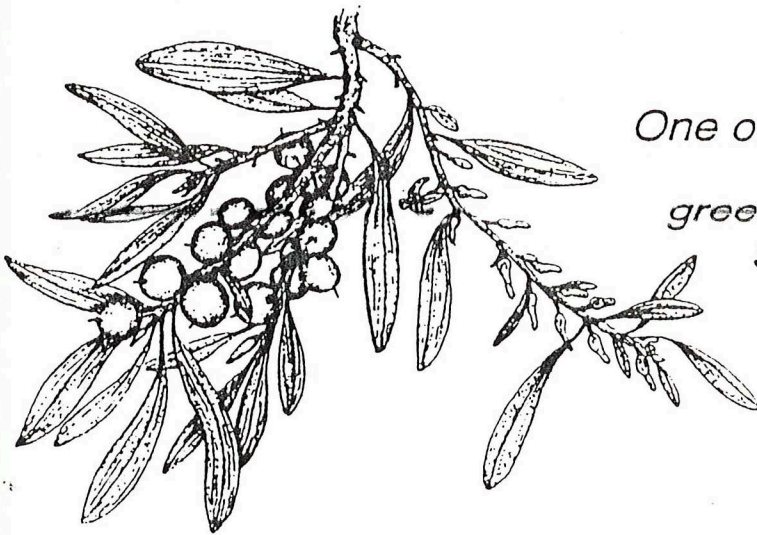
AXE GRINDING GROOVES :

Axe grinding or tool sharpening grooves are found throughout the state wherever suitable rock outcrops occur. Axe grinding grooves are generally found on flat areas of soft rock such as sandstone. They are often found near waterholes or creek beds which contain water necessary for the sharpening process. From the shape of the groove it is possible to determine which type of tool was made or sharpened. Axe grinding grooves are broad and shallow, whereas narrower, deeper grooves were probably caused by grinding bone or wood.

*Grooves are found on rock near pools or streams in many areas because water was needed to clean the stone and keep it cool during grinding.*



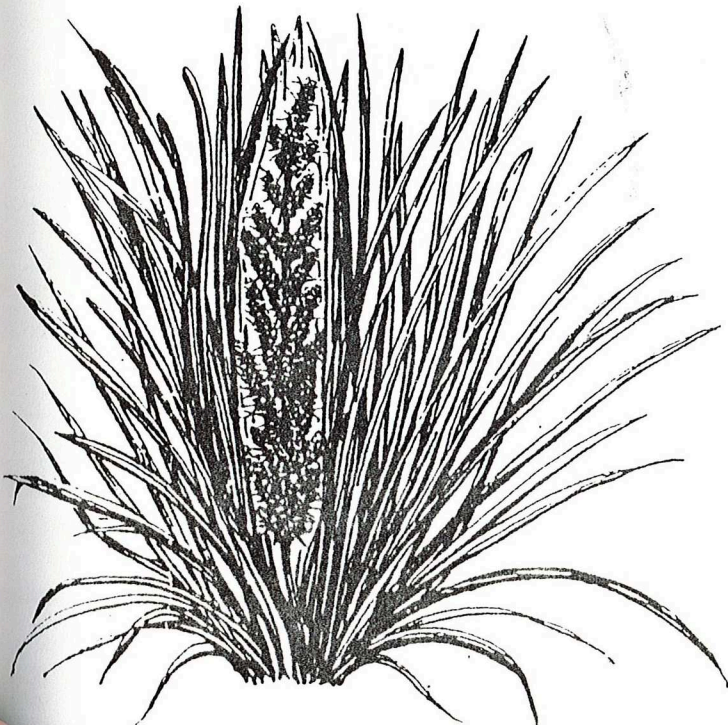
## PLANTS USED BY THE DARUG TRIBE



One of the geebung, *Persoonia levis*  
A shrub with broad bright green leaves and black flaky bark, its small green fruit were eaten raw.



Coast Banksia, *Banksia integrifolia*, with leaves of deep green and a silvery underside. Flowers of grevilleas, bottlebrushes and banksias were sucked for nectar or soaked in water to make a sweet drink.



A very useful rush plant, *Lomandra longifolia*, springs up in many spots.

Aborigines ate the flowers, the white succulent leaf bases and they may have ground the seeds to make damper as is done elsewhere. They made bags from the leaves for carrying their food.

SOME DARUG WORDS :

Here is a short list of DARUG words for animals, birds, fish and trees which may still be seen in the Burwood municipality in parks, or waterfront reserves along Cooks river.

ANIMALS

Brush-tailed possum

Rat

Mouse

BIRDS

Duck

Sea gull

Comorant

Magpie

Crow

Kookaburra

Parrot

Heron

FISH

Blackfish

Toadfish

Mullet ( large )

TREES

Casuarina

Figtree

DARUG NAME

boo-roo-min

wurra

bo-gul

yoo-rongi

girra-girra

go-wally

ter-ra-wan-a

wergin

go-gen-ne-gine

go-ril

duralia

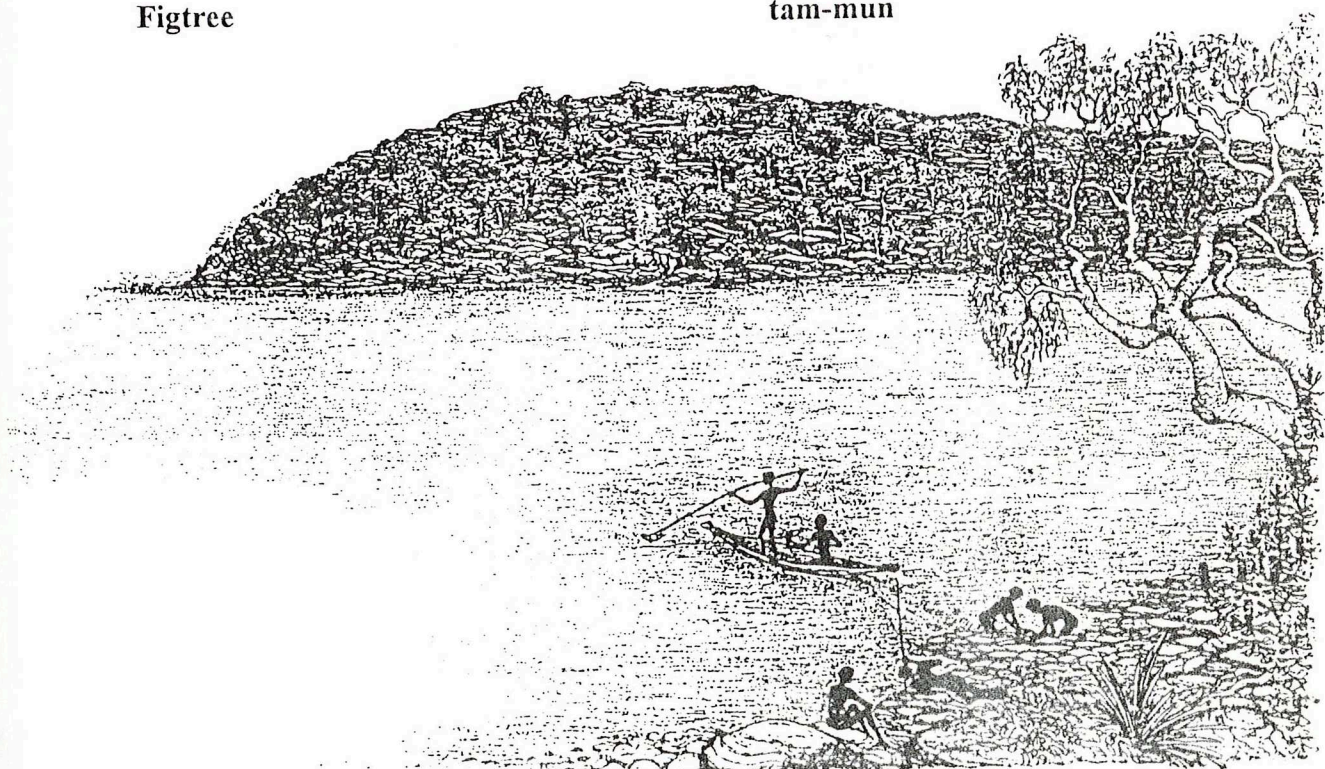
caroom-ma

cagone

wa-ra-diel

goomum

tam-mun



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TABLE 1. ABORIGINAL CLANS OF THE SYDNEY REGION  
Derived from ethnographic accounts, 1828 census, blanket returns.

COASTAL CLANS

LOCATION	NAME
<u>KURINGGAI TRIBE</u>	
Broken Bay-West Head	CARIGAL
Brisbane Water	NORTHEAST ARM "TRIBE"
Tuggerah Beach	TUGGERA
Wyang	WYONG
Narara	NARARA
Erina	ERINA
Manly	KAYIMAI
Fig Tree Point	GORUALGAL
Sydney Harbour	BURRABURRAGAL
Turrumurra-Lane Cove River	TURRAMURRAGAL
Cammeray	CAMMERAIGAL
Manly - Dee Why	CANNALGAL
<u>DARUG (EORA)</u>	
Duck River	WATEGORA (WATTAGURRA)
Kissing Point - Ryde	WALLUMATTAGAL
Botany Bay	KAMEYGAL
Maroubra	MURU-ORA-DIAL (MURUBORA)
Sydney	CADIGAL
Concord	WANGAL
Sow and Pigs (Harbour)	BIRABIRRAGAL
Bradley's Head	BOROGEGAL YURUEY
<u>DIHARAWAL</u>	
?	THAMPA YARRAMAH
Wollongong	FIVE ISLANDS
Bulli	BULLI
Lake Illawarra	ILLAWARRA
Crooked River	CROOKED RIVER "TRIBE"
Kangaroo Valley	KANGAROO GROUND "TRIBE"
Bong Bong- Thirroul	THREAWAL (THURRAWAL?)
Royal National Park	TAGARY
Wollongong?	WODI WODI
Minto-Holsworthy	NORONGERRAGAL
	NUNNUNGERRUNGAL
Kurnell	GWEAGAL
Berrima - Bundanoon	BUNDA

Photocopy  
KOHEN, James The Darug and their neighbours