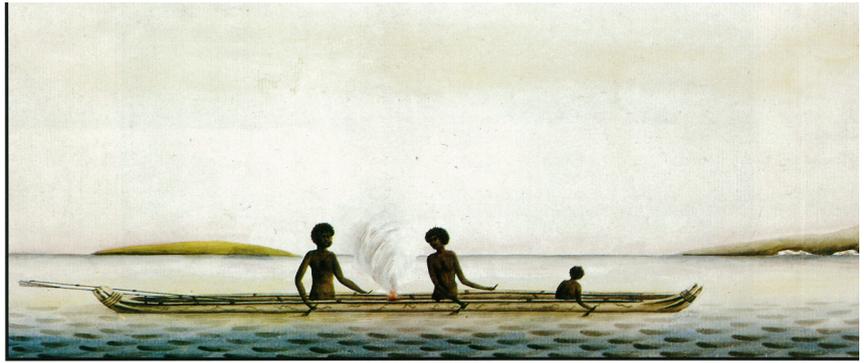


THE WANGAL PEOPLE



A family and fire in a canoe.

The Canada Bay area was part of the traditional lands of the Aboriginal people of the Wangal clan (also spelt 'Wann-gal'), whose name was derived from the word for their country.

Aboriginal people of the Wangal

The Wangal were a clan of the Darug (sometimes spelt Dharug) tribe or language group. They called themselves the Eora, meaning 'the people'. The Wangal clan's territory is thought to have originally extended from Darling Harbour, around the Balmain Peninsula (including Goat Island (called Me-mel or Memill) almost to Parramatta in the west, the Parramatta River formed the northern boundary although it is uncertain how far south their land extended. The Wangal are believed to have occupied the area for over 20,000 years. First contact was made with local Aboriginals of the Wangal Clan by Captain John Hunter who led an exploration of the Parramatta River. On 5 February 1788 while having breakfast he was met by Wangal at the location now referred to as Breakfast Point. The Wangal called the area Booridiow-o-gule.

During the summer months, the Wangal gathered much of their food from along the Parramatta River. The food consisted mainly of fish and shell fish and the remains of these meals, known as shell middens, may still be seen at Rodd Park (Rodd Point).

Woollarawarre Bennelong

One of the best known members of the Wangal was Woollarawarre Bennelong, who had a special relationship with Goat Island for which he had custodial or ownership responsibilities. Bennelong was initially captured in November 1788 along with Colby, of the Cadigal clan, under the instructions of Governor Arthur Phillip so he could learn more about the local Aboriginal people.

Although some sources give the impression that Bennelong was a willing collaborator, more recent sources suggest that Bennelong was a far more complex person in his dealings with the British. While he and Phillip formed cordial relations it is nevertheless thought that he probably instigated the spearing of Phillip in 1790 at Manly as a payback for his earlier abduction. Bennelong had escaped in May 1790 but by September he was leading negotiations with Phillip for peaceful Aboriginal-European contact following the Governor's spearing. Soon he was living at Government House eating at Phillip's table and calling him beanga (father) while Phillip called him doorroow (son).

Bennelong was quick to learn English and adopted many British ways. A brick hut was built for him at Tubowgule (believed to mean 'white-clay headland') now known as Bennelong Point, the site of the Sydney Opera House. In 1792 he travelled with Phillip to England where he met King George III, returning to his country in 1795. He resumed a traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, fathering one son Dickie (c.1803-1823) by his third wife. Bennelong however found himself at variance both with his own people and the British settlers. In January 1813 he died at the age of about 50 at Kissing Point, Sydney, as a result of a tribal fight.

The Wangal at Canada Bay today

Today few traces of Aboriginal occupation survive in the Canada Bay area other than a few cave painting sites, rock shelters and middens. It is believed that Parramatta Road was built upon an Aboriginal pathway which had been in use for centuries.

The Wangal today are remembered by the Wangal Bushland Reserve (Mortlake) and Wangal Place (Five Dock). Bennelong's name has been perpetuated in numerous street names throughout Sydney and is also the name of a Federal Electorate. In nearby Sydney Olympic Park an area has been named the Wanngal Woodland.

Further information

Detailed information is available from the Cadigal Wangal website developed by Marrickville Council that tells the Indigenous history of the Cadigal and Wangal peoples. The URL is <http://www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au/cadigalwangal/main.htm>

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Ban-nel-long (Bannalon) as painted when angry after Botany Bay Colbee was wounded.

Illustrations in this fact sheet are from the Watling Collection at the Natural History Museum, London