



North Sydney

Heritage Leaflet 1

NORTH SYDNEY'S ABORIGINAL PAST

Radiocarbon dating of archaeological material at present-day Cammeray indicates that Aboriginal people were living in the North Sydney area at least 5, 800 years ago. By this time the last ice age had ended and water levels had risen to create Sydney Harbour and its river valleys. The landforms and waterways familiar to these people would have differed little from those that confronted European colonists in the late 18th century.

When the First Fleet arrived in Sydney Cove in 1788, the North Shore of Sydney was inhabited by two Aboriginal Bands or Clans, the Cammeraygal and Wallumedegal, who were part of the larger Kuringgai Tribe. As their tribal boundaries were never clearly defined, only approximate locations are known. In 1790 Governor Phillip reported:

... About the north-west part of this harbour there is a tribe which is mentioned as being very powerful, either from their numbers or the abilities of their chief. This district is called Cammerra, the head of the tribe is named Cammerragal, by which name the men of that tribe are distinguished ...

... the opposite shore is called Wallumetta, and the tribe, Wallumedegal ...

We know more about the Cammeraygals because of their social status and the consequent written and pictorial observations of the early colonists. It was noted that they were 'robust and muscular' people, and the men presided over the initiation of young males from other Sydney area groups.

A Cammeraygal man called Carradah made the acquaintance of Lieutenant Lidgbird Ball of the ship *Supply*. The connection between the two men was significant enough for Carradah to 'exchange' names and adopt the title Mr Ball for himself. He may well have aided the Englishman in his explorations of north shore areas such as Balls Head, which was named in the Englishman's honour. The Aboriginal name for the area was apparently not recorded.

By the early 1800s Aboriginal social structures had been dramatically affected by dispersal and disease. Indeed Cammeraygal land was being appropriated by Europeans as early as 1894 when Samuel Lightfoot was 'granted' 30 acres at Kirribilli. By the 1860s the Aborigines were only occasional visitors to the North Shore. At Christmas time groups of natives would come from country districts and camp in the caves in Cremorne Reserve and near Kurraba Road at Neutral Bay. There they waited to receive the annual gift of a blanket each, given by the Government. During the visit of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh in 1868, the Aborigines were collected from various country areas to perform a large corroboree at Kirribilli to entertain the Royal visitor.

Today few, if any, of the Aboriginal people living in the northern suburbs can trace their ancestry to Cammeraygal or Wallumedegal tribes. The physical evidence of the first inhabitants of the North Shore can be found in fire-charred caves, stencilled hands painted on stone, engravings of animals and weapons on rocks, middens of whitened seashells from ancient meals.

Balls Head has some of the most significant remaining Aboriginal sites in North Sydney. The Australian Museum investigated a rock shelter at Balls Head in 1964 where the skeleton of a female was discovered. The site was revisited in 1971 and further documented. The human remains had been either interred or abandoned in the

rock shelter though there was evidence of subsequent human disturbance. A small tooth with traces of vegetable gum found near the skeleton suggests that the woman had adorned her hair or wore a necklace.

450 artefacts were recovered from various layers of soil in the shelter. Most of these were waste flakes from tool manufacture and tiny stone tools such as barbs, known as microliths. There were fabricating stones, scrapers and cores.

Food remains consisted almost entirely of shellfish. The main species were the rock oyster, the hairy mussel and the Sydney cockle and mud oyster, both of which are now virtually extinct in Port Jackson. Their presence confirms the importance of the harbour as a source of food for the Cammeraygal. The study concluded that the site had been used by women, who gathered shellfish, and men, who made and repaired implements.

Recommended reading:

***Aboriginal North Sydney: an outline of indigenous history* by Ian Hoskins, North Sydney Council, 2007.**

SIGNIFICANT PLACES

The names of many of our local suburbs, parks and streets derive from Aboriginal words and names.

BENELONG ROAD - the Aboriginal befriended by Governor Phillip, 'Benelong'.

CAMMERAY - from the Cammeraygals, the chief Band or Clan of the area.

EUROKA STREET - word, thought to mean 'sunny corner'.

KIRRIBILLI - derived from the Aboriginal word 'Kiarabilli' meaning a 'good fishing spot'.

PARAWEEEN STREET - comes from an Aboriginal word 'Parrwi'; believed to refer to the Spit.

GOOWEEBAHREE - colonists thought the Aboriginal name for Lavender Bay was Quiberie meaning a spring of fresh water. This is a more recent variation of that name.

WALLUMETTA PLACE - another spelling for the Aboriginal Band or Clan known as the Wallumedegals.

WARRINGAH EXPRESSWAY, WARRINGAH ROAD of Aboriginal origin meaning 'signs of rain'.

WARUNGAREEYAH - the Aboriginal name for Blues Point

WEEYUH WEEYUH - the Aboriginal name for Careening Cove

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