

INDIGENOUS SETTLEMENT AND OCCUPATION OF BAWLEY POINT KIOLOA AND TERMEIL

A personal account from a local Indigenous Elder...

"I grew up in a humpy (house) by the northern shore of Meroo Lake. There was my Mum, Dad, Grandparents, older brother and older sister and other relatives at that time.

We were constantly hiding from the State Welfare people. They could sneak around late at night and grab us indigenous kids and we would have become a part of the stolen generation.

At Meroo we were nourished by the food of the local area. We hunted and gathered – being lobster, abalone, fish, native vegetables, plants and fruits and we had our natural medicines as well. At that time my parents and aboriginal people were required to have a Permit to go into towns. We socialised with our relatives and friends – particularly on weekends when the welfare people weren't around.

We also moved around a bit so as to avoid the attention of the welfare officers – I lived for some time at Nowra, then Wallaga Lake, then back to Meroo and for a time when I was about 15 to 17 At Gynea in the Sutherland area where I attended the local high school. I lived in a hostel (Kiranari – which means a place of learning even though it was the hostel).

After high school I attended Randwick TAFE where I qualified as a brick layer and this became my trade for a number of years.

Due to the generally negative popular Media (mainly the newspapers of the day) I created the Koori Mail newspaper in 1991. The paper is still circulated nationwide today.

Our house at Meroo was eventually burnt down by a State government agency.

Locally there are some very important indigenous archaeological site such as the Middens at Mud Holes beach that are some of the oldest in NSW. There are also substantial Middens at the southern end of Kioloa beach. There is also a grinding stone area within a part of the ANU property – which is approx. 16,000 years old. There are also 2 large Middens on Brush Island that are many thousands of years old.

More recently I found a non locally occurring sea shell at the top of Duras Mountain (a meeting place for trade between tribes) which was officially dated to be 10,000 to 15,000 years old. The shell had originated in far north Queensland and brought to this area of the coast. Items such as this shell were often traded between tribes up and down the east coast of Australia.

The way forward for both indigenous and white Australians is that our historically important lands and burial sites must be absolutely protected.

There needs to be more consultation between Crown Lands, The local Council's and the Indigenous community. Particularly where works are proposed on public lands so that important site are preserved.

I am more at ease now as regards my native culture and its mix with the Australia/European style culture and the mutual respect that is shown.”

Owen Carriage

Indigenous Elder and Kioloa Local

15 February 2025



The First Nations people of Australia are believed to have been on the South Coast of New South Wales for at least 60,000 years.

Dating of carbon deposits and archaeological material found in a cave near Burrill Lake confirms 21,000 years at that site. It is hard to get such a number of years into perspective. A thousand generations? A over 200 times the duration of white settlement? We are not used to such scales of time. It is long enough to include the last ice age, when sea levels were lower by up to 100 metres. The shore would have been further east, and Brush Island not an island at all.

The Bawley Point and Kioloa area is generally accepted as lying within Yuin country. The Yuin cultural area is stated to extend from the Shoalhaven River in the north, to the Victorian border in the south and to the eastern edge of the tablelands in the west.

There was no permanent European settlement impacting directly on the lives of the native Australians of the Shoalhaven area until the late 1820s. However, nonetheless there was a considerable amount of interaction with Europeans travelling along the coast for a variety of reasons in the preceding decades. In particular there was considerable whaling and sealing activity occurring to the south and the ships travelling the coastline as a result of this activity may well have pulled in along the Shoalhaven and even the Bawley Point and Kioloa coast at times – (note there have been cave an rock wall paintings found depicting the Endeavour or first fleet boats found on the south coast).

The first documentary record of the Indigenous people of the Shoalhaven and Eurobodalla coast was the sighting of a number of individuals on the beach in 1770. In this year Captain James Cook and his crew sailed up the south coast on board the Endeavour; they did not land but did record seeing five native Australians standing on the shore in Murramarang, on the 22nd of April of that year. In Lieutenant James Cook's private log he recorded only that they, *"Saw several people upon the beach."* The master's mate recorded slightly more detail, stating, *"...as we stood along shore we saw four or five of the native peoples sitting near the fire; they appeared to be naked and very black, which was all we could discern at that distance."* A number of crew members had recorded the sighting of smoke from fires in the preceding days' travel along the coastline.

There are very few sites on the NSW South Coast with this much heritage. Material found at Murramarang has been dated back to an astounding 12,000 years. The headland, with its rock platforms, fishing, and nesting sea birds, was an important meeting point for Aboriginal people. Large fires where people cooked their food would have been visible for miles, and some archaeological finds suggest people in this area ate whales and dolphins. These days, the area is still used by local Aboriginal people for fishing, recreational and educational activities. Signs along the Murramarang Aboriginal Area walking track identify some of the most important features of the area.

When Captain Cook first spotted what he would later call Pigeon House Mountain from the sea, he sailed towards the coast to see if he could find a safe place to anchor. On 22 April 1770, he made his first sighting of Aboriginal people - some in bark canoes, others on land - here at Murramarang. Incidentally, the Aboriginal name for Pigeon House is 'Didthul', which is connected to the ocean through Dreaming stories. The first white settlers came to the area to graze cattle and cut timber in the late 1820s.

