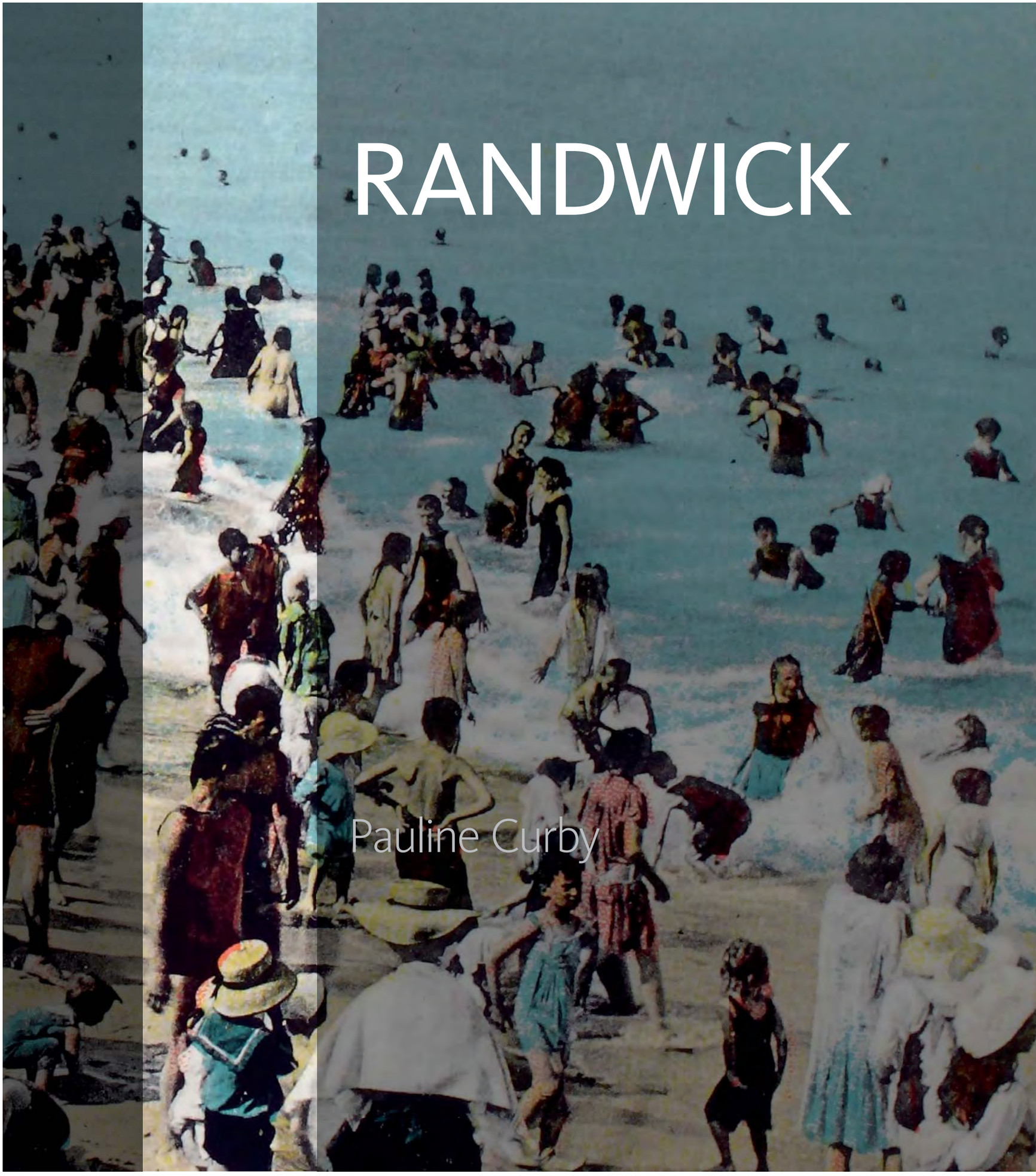
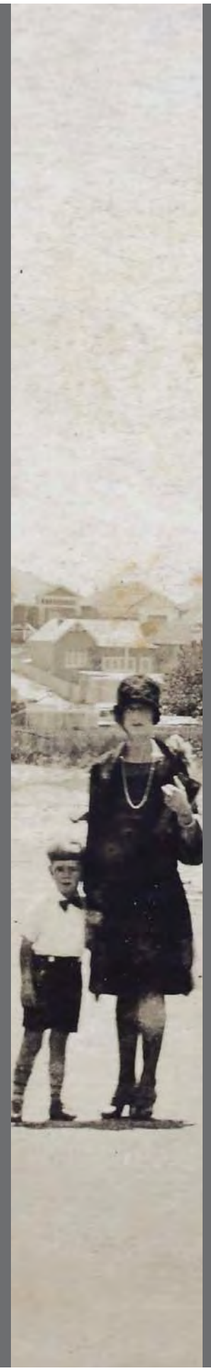


RANDWICK

Pauline Curby

RANDWICK
Pauline Curby

Readers of this book are warned that it may contain images and/or references to deceased people, which could cause distress or sadness particularly for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



RANDWICK

Pauline Curby

Randwick City Council
a sense of community

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

As we celebrate 150 years of local government in Randwick, I am delighted to write the foreword to *Randwick*, the comprehensive history of what we now call the City of Randwick.

In many ways, the history of Randwick can be seen as the history of Australia in microcosm. *Randwick* brings to light our rich social heritage and the unique physical environment of the 'beautiful marine township of Randwick', as it was called in the 1858 petition requesting that Randwick become a municipality. The Municipality of Randwick was incorporated on 22 February 1859, one of first to be proclaimed in New South Wales.

This book covers the full spectrum of social diversity, cultural groupings and occupations, including our proud Indigenous heritage, transport and infrastructure challenges, and suburban development. It also gives a balanced representation of the roles of both men and women in our history.

Randwick City Council commissioned historian Pauline Curby to write a professionally researched, academically rigorous and well-referenced history of our whole local government area. A number of previous publications dealt with aspects of Randwick's history, however, many were not fully referenced and the authors did not have access to all of the resources that are now available electronically.

Pauline spent more than two years researching this book, using a wealth of original material drawn from government and non-government sources. She received invaluable assistance from many keen local historians and the Randwick and District Historical Society's voluntary members, as well as from our council's Local Studies staff. I thank them all for their support and their dedication to ensuring the success of this publication.

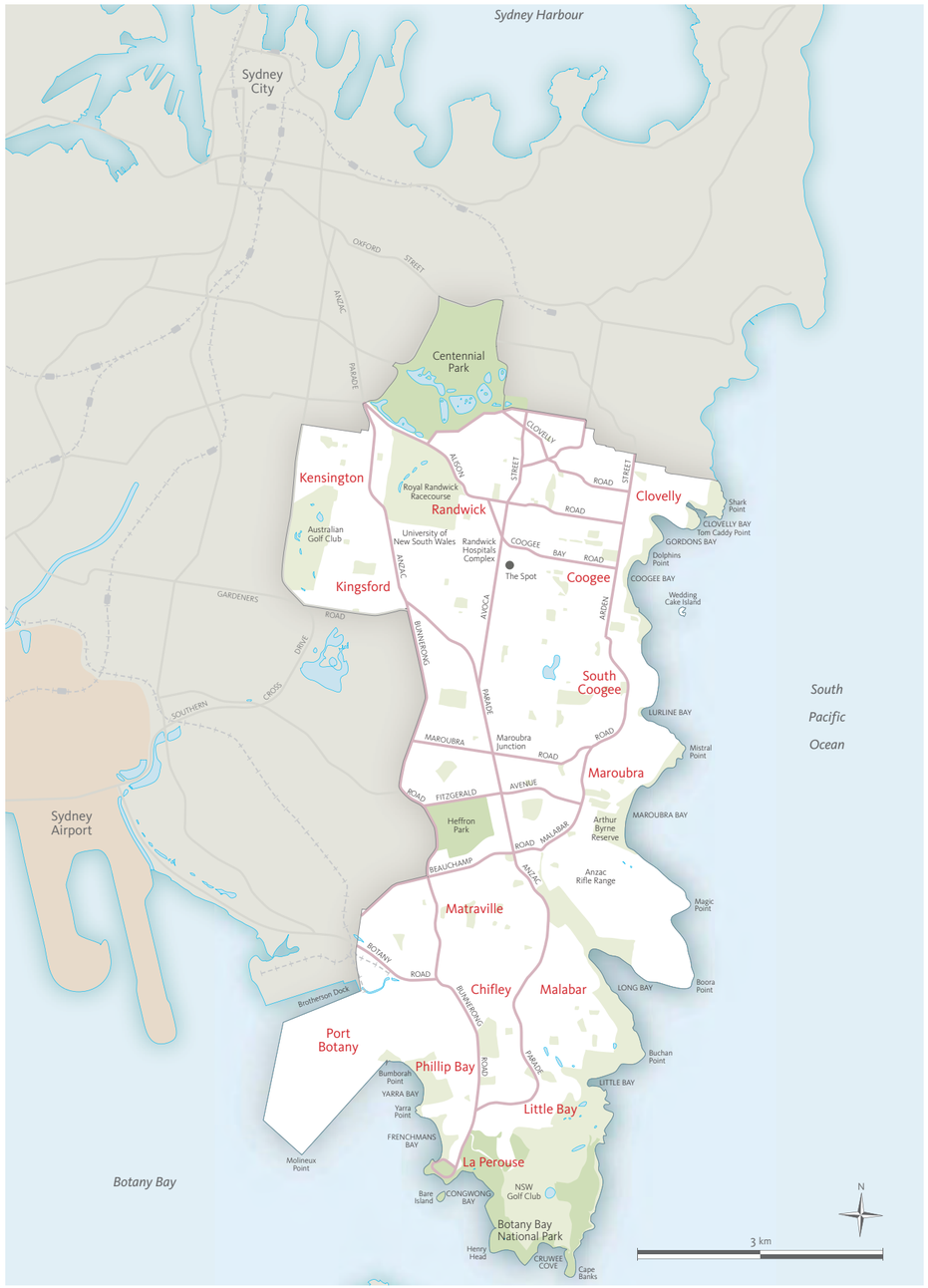
Randwick is a superb book that has achieved a fine balance between rigorous historical research and an accessible style that I am confident will appeal to a diverse audience. Written in a lively and engaging way, *Randwick* will be an invaluable reference for students and a source of great enjoyment for residents, visitors and general readers for many years to come.

Cr Bruce Notley-Smith
Mayor of Randwick

THE CITY OF RANDWICK

MAP OF THE CITY OF SYDNEY, SHOWING THE CITY OF RANDWICK

MAP OF THE CITY OF RANDWICK



INTRODUCTION

Rugged yet inviting, the coastline south of Sydney Harbour is spectacular. Whether viewed from the air, from the sea or when walking along the coastal walkway, it is some of the most dramatic scenery Australia has to offer. Behind the striking coastline sits a maze of suburban development, the uniformity of which obscures the fact that before European settlement this would have been an equally striking and varied landscape.

The eastern seaboard of Sydney was a place of swamps and sandhills, with a never-ending flow of crystal-clear water draining through the dunes into a system of freshwater swamps. Banksia Scrub grew prolifically, interspersed with sandstone outcrops and the varied heath and low forest vegetation. Extensive sandstone rock platforms and outcrops with low 'wind-pruned heathland' and small shrubs were a feature of the area. There were few stands of tall timber, but a patch of woodland grew on sandstone in a gully north-west of Coogee.

The swamps, which were an important source of Sydney's water supply in the second half of the nineteenth century, still exist but only as remnants. The Banksia Scrub that once grew on the deep sand sheets of the City of Randwick has now almost disappeared, although remnants can be seen in Centennial Park and east of Jennifer Street at Little Bay.

It is difficult to imagine what the current suburban landscape was like more than 200 years ago. As European settlement moved slowly over the landscape vegetation was cleared, transforming the stable sand dunes into what are referred to as transgressive dunes. Sand dunes dominated coastal southern Sydney, stretching from Devonshire Street, where Central Railway is now located, to the shores of Botany Bay. First Fleeter William Bradley considered these 'remarkable sandhills' a landmark for anyone trying to locate the entrance to Port Jackson.

Huge sand dunes that could be seen from the Blue Mountains were also located on the southern side of the bay, and still existed after World War II. In many parts of Randwick Municipality, dealing with sand was a feature of life. In 1901, when a tramline was under construction from Sydney to the Coast Hospital, along the entire length of the line banks and cuttings were 'turfed to prevent the sand from blowing away'. Much later, in the late 1960s, sand removal on land in Kensington, owned by the WD & HO Wills tobacco factory, endangered houses in Balfour Road. The extraction and sale of sand from Long Bay Rifle Range and other sites kept Randwick Council solvent at this time.[1]

The sandhills and swamps of this local government area stretch across two cadastral divisions called parishes. As New South Wales was systematically mapped in the 1820s and 1830s, land was divided into counties, each of which contained a number of parishes. These had nothing to do with church administration and were not the basis for local administration, but had purely cadastral significance. What is now the City of Randwick was part of two parishes: the Parish of Alexandria in the north and the Parish of Botany south of Rainbow Street. In the nineteenth century the southern two-thirds of the Parish of Botany was reserved land – some for quarantine, some for defence and, from Rainbow Street to Long Bay, a large area was part of the Church and School Estate.

The northern and southern sections of the Borough of Randwick were like two different worlds in the nineteenth century. In the north, in relatively close proximity to the city, villages grew and settlement spread, while the southern two-thirds the Parish of Botany remained largely undisturbed. Military and government officials often referred to land south of Rainbow Street as 'outside the boundary of the Municipality of Randwick', when it was in fact part of it.[2]

This southern part of the local government area now has three major north–south road systems: Bunnerong Road, partly forming its western boundary; Malabar Road, further to the east; and Anzac Parade, between these two.

Many issues that are critical to life in Australia are all part of Randwick's history. They include the role of Indigenous Australians, the problems associated with Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-existence, and the use and exploitation of land. Social questions, particularly those concerning the care of children, crime and punishment, drinking and gambling, have also played out in Randwick's history, as have technological and medical debates relating to public health, transport and defence in particular. Issues of belief and religious practice, fraught with conflict, are also part of the pattern of this history, as are changing leisure pursuits and their associated cultures. Governance by the Commonwealth, state and, most prominently, local authorities, is another theme demonstrated here that has resonance in Australia generally. Of central significance to the work of local government, despite its relative impotence in New South Wales, has been the process of suburb formation and the beliefs that underpin debates about the sort of urban environment that is considered desirable.

AN EXPLANATORY NOTE

Throughout the history of New South Wales, the names by which local councils are known have changed. From 1858 they were called 'municipalities' but from 1867 to 1906 the terms 'borough' or – for a rural and less populous district – 'municipal district' were used. Between 1906 and 1993 local government units were called 'municipalities' and 'shires'. After 1993, the terms 'council' and 'councillors', instead of 'aldermen', were used. Randwick was accorded the status of a city in 1990.

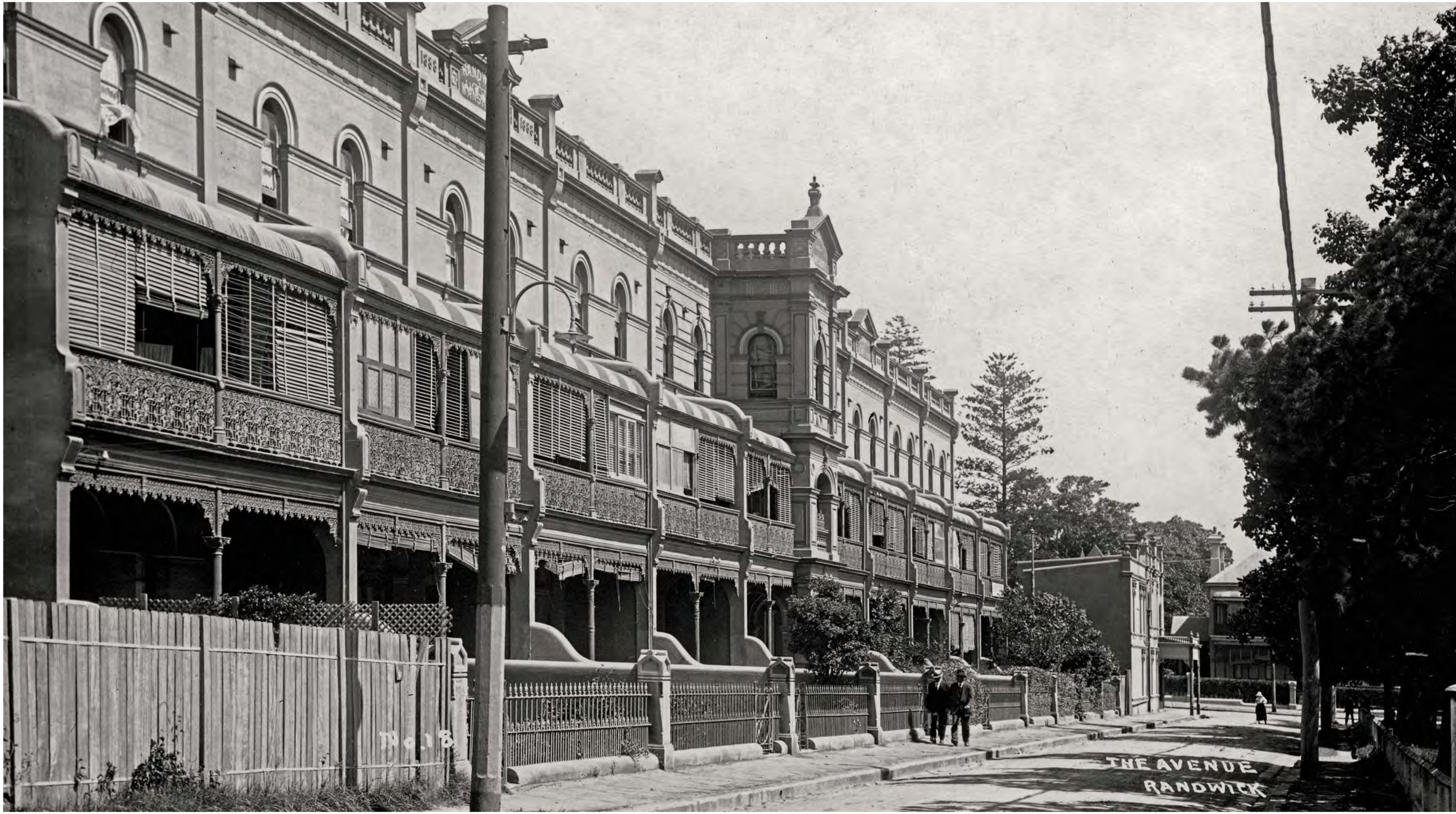
title and contents Street scene, Maroubra Junction, late 1920s, detail. Randwick and District Historical Society

foreword Anzac Parade at Maroubra Junction, looking east up Maroubra Bay Road, late 1920s, detail. Randwick and District Historical Society

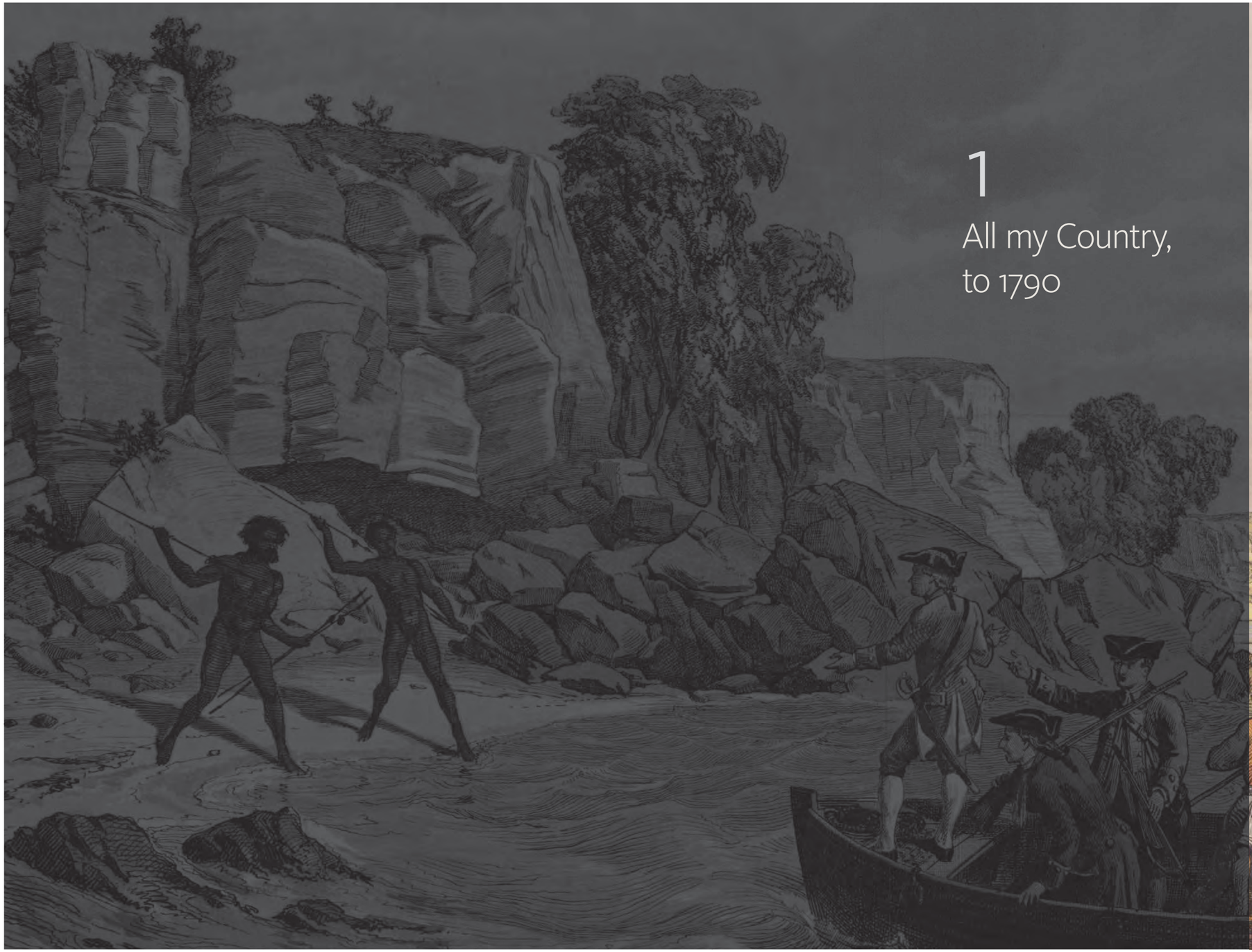
introduction Sketch of Maroubra woolwash, the beach and Chinese market gardens, 1910, by Myles Dunphy, detail. State Library of NSW

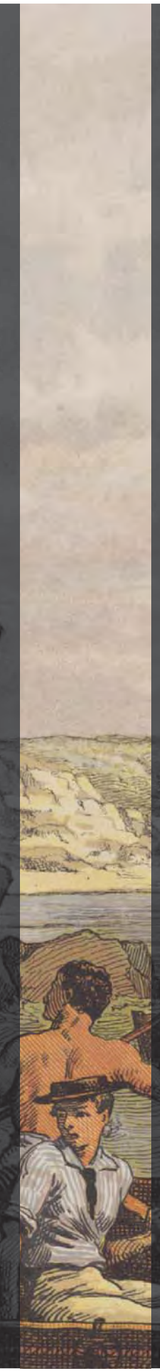
above View of Claremont College, c. 1930. Courtesy of the Ball, Cohen and Spencer families

following spread Avonmore Terraces, The Avenue, c. 1919. This graceful row of terraces fell into gradual decline over the twentieth century. They have been restored in recent decades. Courtesy RJM collection

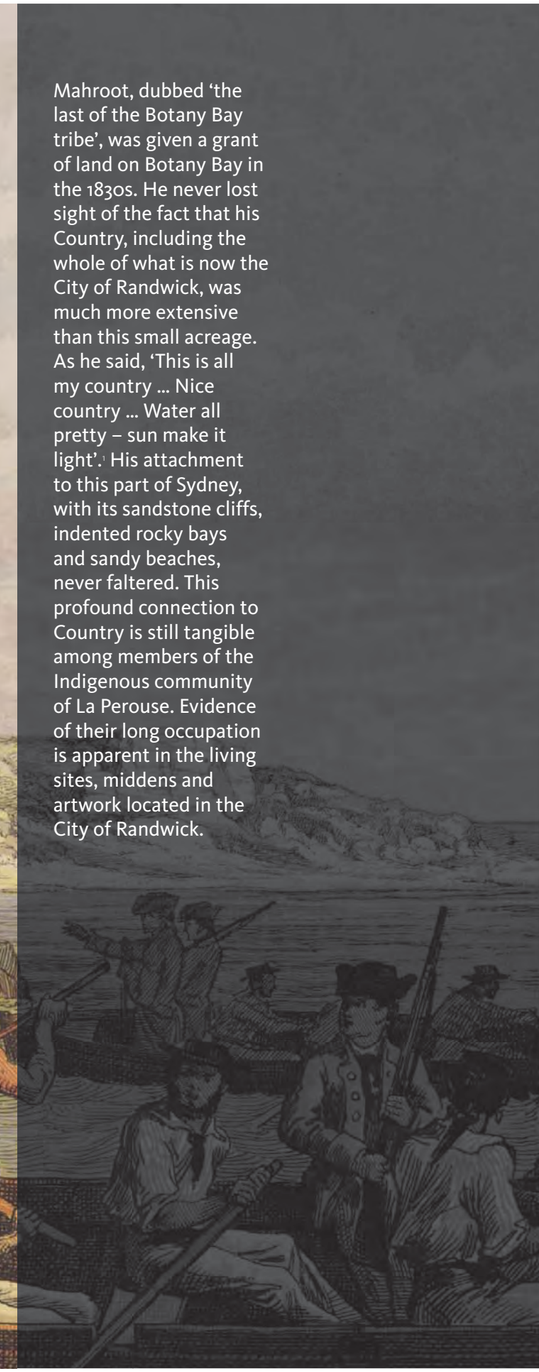

THE AVENUE
RANDWICK

1
All my Country, to 1790





Mahroot, dubbed 'the last of the Botany Bay tribe', was given a grant of land on Botany Bay in the 1830s. He never lost sight of the fact that his Country, including the whole of what is now the City of Randwick, was much more extensive than this small acreage. As he said, 'This is all my country ... Nice country ... Water all pretty – sun make it light'.[1] His attachment to this part of Sydney, with its sandstone cliffs, indented rocky bays and sandy beaches, never faltered. This profound connection to Country is still tangible among members of the Indigenous community of La Perouse. Evidence of their long occupation is apparent in the living sites, middens and artwork located in the City of Randwick.



THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF KA-MAY

The Indigenous people from the northern shore of Botany Bay have often been referred to as Kameygal/Gameygal – the people from *Ka-may* (Botany Bay). However, there is no easy answer to the fraught question of clan boundaries in Sydney, particularly because an epidemic in 1789 caused massive disruption of the Indigenous people in the area. This epidemic preceded any sustained contact between Indigenous peoples and Europeans, and there is therefore very little documentation regarding the early people of Botany Bay.[2] Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that those from the northern shore of Botany Bay people spoke what is referred to as the 'Sydney language', while the people south of what is now the Georges River spoke another language, called Dharawal.

Some of the current La Perouse community are descended from people who moved from the south coast, and so have a Dharawal heritage, although this does not apply to the whole community, as Indigenous people came to La Perouse from a number of localities. There is a tradition among members of the Timbery family, for example, that they are descended from the Wollengang/Wallengang people.[3]

ARTISTS WORKING IN STONE

Whales featured frequently in the artwork of Sydney's first people, with one of the most interesting examples located at what is now La Perouse. When first recorded in 1891, this set of engravings consisted of a 38-foot long 'fine carving' of a whale, with a 15-foot calf inside. Both figures were 'deeply cut with a smooth groove'. When its 'discoverer', surveyor WD Campbell, asked 'the blacks at the native encampment nearby' about the engraving, a senior woman told him this was a 'bora' whale. The area is likely to have been a ceremonial site, known in south-eastern Australia as bora grounds or bora rings.[4]

Campbell's investigations in the 1890s revealed that extensive Aboriginal engravings survived in Sydney despite a century of white settlement. In addition to the 'bora' whale at La Perouse, he located several sites at Bumborah Point, Long Bay, Maroubra and Coogee.[5] Other Aboriginal sites attracted the interest of the Australian Museum staff in College Street, which has maintained a scholarly tradition to the present. In the early twentieth century, palaeontologist Robert Etheridge and his colleague Thomas Whitelegge discovered what they referred to as Aboriginal 'workshops' on the Sydney coastline. After severe storms had displaced the 'sand hummocks' along a number of beaches, Whitelegge found extensive debris derived from the manufacture of stone tools. While deposits found at Maroubra were not as substantial as those at Bondi, further north, they were intriguing nonetheless. Early in 1899, as the men wandered over the sandhills at the northern end of Maroubra Beach, they found 'sundry flint chips'. They recalled:

> On reaching the summit of the sand hill, a strange feature presented itself, instead of the usual bare waste of sand, the whole surface was studded with butts of Banksia trees two or three feet high, and one or two feet in diameter. The intervening spaces were covered with a scrubby growth, consisting of the stems and roots of various plants, many of which were standing Pandanus-like, having roots covered with lime from a quarter to half an inch thick … The whole area appeared like a miniature skeleton forest, of black and white stems and roots.[6]

Thousands of stone artefacts lay before them. While some of these were made from local sandstone, others had been manufactured from imported material. Extensive patches of black flint chips and red or yellow jasper gave Etheridge and Whitelegge the strange feeling that the 'native artist in stone-working' had just left his workshop.

Hastily burying the larger artefacts, they gathered what they could of the smaller specimens to take to the museum. Among these were tomahawks, grindstones, a nose ornament, knives, scrapers, gravers, drills and spear points. One object they found particularly interesting was a 'very peculiar lancet-like surgical knife or scarificator'. They later called this flaked asymmetrical tool a 'chipped-back surgical knife'. It is now known as a Bondi point, after the beach behind which Whitelegge first found these tools and where they were made most prolifically. Thousands of Bondi points would later be uncovered at locations further south, such as Cronulla and Towra Point.[7]

A CAMP AT RANDWICK

It was to be many years before rigorous scientific methods evolved that would allow reliable dating of artefacts and sites. Such techniques were used on an Aboriginal hearth, or campsite, which was discovered within a sand dune during the excavation of the cemetery of the Asylum for the Relief of Destitute Children in 1995 (now the location of the Prince of Wales Hospital). There was some surprise when this site was dated to 8000 BP, making it the oldest such site in coastal Sydney at that time.

With the occupation of Australia now conservatively estimated at approximately 40 000 to 60 000 BP, this does not seem a

previous spread *Captain Cook's landing at Botany*, 1770, detail, published in the *Town and Country Journal*, December 1872. National Library of Australia

above Sketch of 'Timbere', 1819, by visiting French artist Jacques Arago. This early sketch is of a man whom members of the Timbery family identify as their ancestor, signifying their long connection with the Sydney region. State Library of NSW

opposite Backed blades including Bondi points, undated. These distinctive flaked stone tools, found at Bondi, are just some of the many artefacts discovered in the eastern suburbs since the 1890s. Photo by George Serras, National Museum of Australia

A PRECIOUS CANOE

The annual migration of whales from the Great Southern Ocean, making their way north to breed, has been watched for thousands of years. A creation story of the local Dharawal people tells of a whale swimming up and down the coast in search of a precious canoe that had been stolen. As with many stories of the Dreaming, it explains physical features in the landscape.

According to this Dreaming story, long, long ago a group of animals decided to leave their country and cross the ocean to find better hunting grounds. Whale jealously guarded his large canoe, the only one that was seaworthy, refusing to allow anyone to touch it. But Starfish cleverly distracted Whale while the other animals stole the canoe and set off on their long ocean voyage.

When the ruse was discovered, Whale was outraged and viciously attacked his one-time friend before setting off in pursuit of the fleeing canoe. As he swam, water spouted from a hole in his head acquired during his fight with Starfish. The fugitives were terrified but, led by Koala, rowed on with determination until land was finally sighted. Brolga – always excited – danced and jumped around in the canoe to such an extent that it soon had a hole in the bottom. The friends landed and as they rested Brolga pushed the canoe off shore, where it sank to become a small island called Gan-nan-gung (now called Windang Island).

When Whale arrived and saw what had become of his canoe, he was furious. He had no option but to swim along the coast, as he and his descendants have done ever since.

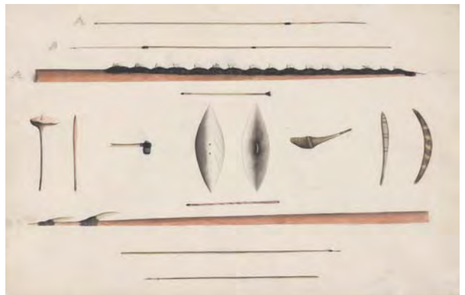
Today thousands of Australians gather at vantage points along the east coast of Australia to view the whales and in Sydney, just south of Botany Bay's southern headland, Cape Solander is one of the most popular whale-watching spots.

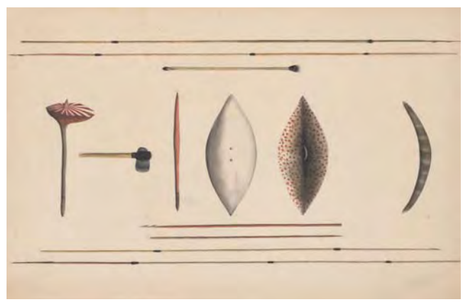
particularly old site. However, when the impact of changing sea levels is taken into consideration, it is very old. During the period of human occupation in Australia, the Sydney coastline has moved considerably.

Around 60 000 years ago, sea level was 30 to 35 metres lower than at present. During a period of relatively fast change between 25 000 and 15 000 years ago, it was between 110 and 130 metres lower. At that time, the coastline at Port Jackson was about 15 kilometres further east than at present, while the coast of Botany Bay was 6 kilometres further east. Many Aboriginal sites on what was then a broad undulating plain were flooded, as the climate became warmer and wetter, and sea levels rose.

The sea continued its inexorable rise until between 4500 and 1500 years ago, when sea levels were a metre higher than at present. Australian Museum scientist Dr Val Attenbrow argues that despite these changes, Indigenous people have lived in a relatively stable coastal environment for the last 6500 years. What makes the Prince of Wales Hospital site exceptional is that it is one of the few sites in Sydney predating this period of relative stability.[8]

A variety of site types, such as campsites, middens, axe-grinding grooves, rock art and burials, are found in the City of Randwick. Many sites have disappeared as a result of neglect or have been destroyed by being built over, with some now covered in concrete.[9] What is left is managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in consultation with local Aboriginal people, some of whom trace their descent to the people who lived in the district in 1770 – the year their lifestyle was intruded upon by the outside world.





above and right *Aboriginal hunting implements and weapons*, c. 1790, attributed to the Port Jackson Painter. There was a great deal of interest in Britain in 'primitive' life in all its phases, with a number of contemporary publications using illustrations similar to these. National Library of Australia

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

It is thought that the Indigenous people of Australia's east coast first made contact with Europeans on 29 April 1770. It was on this date that Lieutenant James Cook and his compatriots of the Royal Navy sailed into what is now Botany Bay, aboard HM Bark *Endeavour*.

While the *Endeavour* was anchored in Botany Bay, the local people were shot at and the Englishmen stole a number of their spears, depriving them of implements that were produced by a painstaking process. There was no amicable contact between the two groups, as noted by Cook, his passenger Joseph Banks and artist Sydney Parkinson in their journals.

At the time of their initial landing on the bay's southern shore, Banks indicated that the Englishmen had half expected no opposition, as the Aboriginal men fishing in their canoes had 'scarce lifted their eyes from their employment' when the *Endeavour* sailed past. The landing was resisted, however. Banks recorded that as they attempted to land:

> two of the men came down upon them, each armed … They called to us very loud in a harsh sounding language … in all appearances resolved to dispute our landing to the utmost tho they were but two and we 30 or 40 at least.[10]

Cook related how he was 'obliged' to fire three times at the men and that the second shot hit one of them. This only made one of the local men more defiant and he grabbed a shield to defend himself.[11]

It has been suggested this reaction of 'nonchalance followed by animated resistance' may have been part of a 'repertoire of responses covering encounters with strangers, not an invitation for retaliation'.[12] This may well be so. Cook and his colleagues knew nothing of Aboriginal etiquette, however; they and their successors would flout it on many occasions.

Captain Cook's landing at Botany, 1770, published in the *Town and Country Journal*, December 1872. The artist of this nineteenth-century lithograph is unlikely to have visited the landing site shown, as it is not depicted accurately in this work. National Library of Australia

BOTANISING AS USUAL

For the eight days the Englishmen spent at Botany Bay, wonderful autumn weather prevailed. Conditions recorded in the ship's log on 3 May were typical: 'Winds at SE a gentle breeze and fair weather'. There was a storm one evening but conditions were otherwise ideal, and the crew spent their time 'wooding and fishing' or at other times 'wooding and refreshing'.[13] They also explored the surrounding countryside, filled up their water tanks and undertook some refurbishment of the *Endeavour*. To Sydney Parkinson, this was an idyllic scene: 'The country is very level and fertile; the soil, a kind of grey sand; when we arrived everything seemed in perfection.'[14]

The botanists Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander spent a good deal of their time, in Banks' words, 'botanising as usual' and took the first steps in establishing what would become a plant collection of international significance. After several days Banks commented, 'Our collection of plants has grown so immensely large that it was necessary that some extraordinary care should be taken of them least they should spoil in the books'. He spent a day on shore, drying the plants by laying them in the sun.[15] As a result of this voluminous collecting, Cook later decided to change the name he had ascribed to the bay. What had tentatively been named Sting-Ray Bay – because of the enormous stingrays caught there – became Botany Bay, in recognition of the 'great quantity of New Plants etc Mr Banks and Dr Solander collected in this place'.[16] The name given to the bay by the uncommunicative local people was not known.

While most of the Englishmen's time was spent on the southern shore of Botany Bay, they did cross onto the north shore, into what is now the City of Randwick. On their first day they ventured to the 'north point of the bay', where they found fresh water, which came 'trinkling down and stood in pools among the rocks'. But as this was 'troublesome to come at', it was decided that the small stream found earlier on the southern shore was more promising.[17]

On their second day, a good fishing spot was discovered. Banks recorded how 'Myself with the Captn &c were in a sandy cove on the Northern side of the harbour, where we hauld the seine and caught many very fine fish, more than all hands could Eat'.[18]

The following day, Banks wrote:

> Myself in the afternoon ashore on the NW side of the bay, where we went a good way into the countrey which in this place is very sandy and resembles our Moors in England, as no trees grow upon it but every thing is coverd with a thin brush of plants about as high as the knees.[19]

Nowadays it is hard to visualise the countryside the *Endeavour* adventurers saw. In Botany Bay National Park, a far from pristine landscape, 'a thin brush of plants' might prickle your legs as you enjoy a bushwalk, but the vegetation off the tracks is generally much denser than it was in 1770.

LITTLE OF THEIR CUSTOMS

It must have been a considerable relief for the Indigenous people of Botany Bay when their visitors left on 6 May 1770. Cook declared, with refreshing honesty, 'all they seemed to want was for us to be gone'. In reflecting upon the time spent there, he also admitted that he and his colleagues had learnt little of the local people:

> we could but know very little of their customs as we were never able to form any connections with them, they had not so much as touched the things we had left in their hutts on purpose for them to take away.[20]

Years later Mahroot, the 'last of the Botany Bay tribe', recalled how when his people saw 'white fellows' they threw spears because they were afraid. He added:

> they thought they was the devil when they saw them landed first, they did not know what to make of them. When they saw them going up the masts they thought they was oppossums.[21]

When the *Endeavour* returned to London in July 1771, the explorers, seamen and scientists on board became celebrities. While Cook, who received the greatest acclaim, was killed in 1779 on his third voyage, the socially and politically influential Banks lived long enough to have a critical input into Britain's plan to establish a permanent settlement on the shores of Botany Bay.

EMPIRE-BUILDING

As far as we know, the Indigenous inhabitants saw no more 'devils' until January 1788, when the First Fleet – part of Britain's grand scheme of empire-building – arrived in Botany Bay. This time there was more sustained contact between the two races, as the local people's initial reluctance to engage with the newcomers was gradually overcome. Years later Cruwee, a local Aboriginal man, recalled how when he saw the First Fleet vessels he thought they were floating islands.[22]

As one of these 'floating islands', the *Supply*, sailed into Botany Bay on 18 January 1788, Captain Watkin Tench noted 'not less than 40 persons, shouting and making many uncouth signs and gestures' on the southern shore of the Bay. Thus Captain Arthur Phillip – commodore of the fleet – decided to land on the north shore, where a handful of much quieter men could be seen on the beach.[23]

His second-in-command, Captain John Hunter of the flagship *Sirius*, commented: 'We anchored on the north shore, off a sandy bay, which I think as good a berth as any in the bay ... the ground clear and good.'[24]

Hunter also described how men on the southern shore pointed their spears and repeated the words 'wara, wara'. It did not take the Englishmen long to work out that this meant 'go away'.[25] However, these visitors were here to stay. Although they made a permanent settlement a few miles north, their impact would be keenly felt at *Ka-may*, the local name of this large, open bay.[26]

As in 1770, the Aboriginal people were initially wary of the newcomers. Indeed, Surgeon George Worgan recorded how, on an

Botany Bay creeper, 1798, by John Lewin. Lewin arrived in the colony from Britain in 1800 and executed many natural history paintings, landscapes and portraits of Indigenous people. National Library of Australia

Leptospermum scoparium, 1803–08, by John Lewin. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

excursion into the northern part of the Bay, they met Indigenous people who he considered, 'rude unsociable fellows'. When they threw a lance at the intruders, Worgan's party responded – as was fast becoming the custom – by firing a musket over their heads.[27]

Tench expressed clearly how he perceived the relative position of the British and the 'Indians' when he wrote:

> Our first object was to win their affections, and our next to convince them of the superiority we possessed: for without the latter, the former we knew would be of little importance.

As Cook had done before them, presents were proffered but Tench noted with surprise, 'our toys seemed not to be regarded as very valuable'.[28]

Despite there being good fishing spots – in a cove 'round the point just within Bare Island' – and better water that could be accessed easily, there was to be no settlement at *Ka-may* at this stage.[29] Judge Advocate David Collins commented that the small amount of water found on the southern shore was inadequate 'for such a settlement as ours'.[30]

In addition, the south-east swells that came into the bay with great force made *Ka-may* unsuitable. Young Lieutenant Ralph Clark heaved a sigh of relief when Phillip decided to move north, to the superior harbour he had explored a few days after their arrival. 'Thank God,' wrote Clark, 'that we are to remove to Port Jackson and not staye here at Botany Bay'.[31]

It was found, however, that in one vital matter Botany Bay was superior to the 'fine' new harbour further north. Tench maintained that it was better for fishing, noting how the French expedition, which arrived shortly after the First Fleet, caught almost 2000 fish of 'a species of grouper' in one day.[32]

LA PÉROUSE ON DISCOVERIES

Just before the First Fleet left for Port Jackson, more unexpected visitors arrived. The identity of the newcomers evoked intense speculation, of the Europeans at least, when two ships were first sighted on 24 January. However, because of the strong currents, it was not until two days later that they managed to sail into the bay.[33] Ralph Clark expressed the collective amazement:

> The day that we left Botany Bay there came in two Strange Ships which not a little Surprised every body for we as Soon Expected to See St. Paul coming in to the Bay.[34]

In the words of the second lieutenant of the *Sirius*, Philip Gidley King, these newcomers were led by 'Monsieur De La Perouse on discoveries'.[35]

French naval officer Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse, who had arrived so perspicaciously, needed to gather his strength as several of his crew had been killed by 'Indians' in Samoa. He also wanted to build new long boats to replace those lost at that time.

With his frigates, *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe*, La Pérouse was on a voyage of exploration and scientific enquiry – unlike the First Fleet, which had no scientist or even an artist on board. Commissioned by King Louis XVI of France to explore the Pacific, La Pérouse had embarked on a well-equipped and minutely planned voyage of discovery that rivalled that of Captain Cook, a man he much admired.[36] La Pérouse hoped he would be received amicably by the British, as he believed that 'Europeans are all compatriots at such a great distance'.[37]

Now securely in possession of the 'finest harbour in the world', north of Botany Bay, the English could afford to be generous to their traditional rivals. They had no objection to the French visit and there were numerous courteous exchanges during the six weeks that the French stayed at Botany Bay.

While the officers were keen for harmony between the two groups, there were others who just wanted to escape from their continental prison. Watkin Tench commented how the convicts 'soon found the road to Botany Bay, in visits to the French, who would gladly have dispensed with their company'.[38] Indeed, the British were dismayed to learn that several escapees had 'offered themselves to the French navigators on any terms'. When 'so imprudent and improper an experiment' inevitably failed, the convicts had to return to Sydney and to the punishment awaiting them.[39]

While incidents such as this caused no tension, French interaction with the Indigenous people almost did when the British learnt that La Pérouse had fired on 'natives' at Botany Bay. La Pérouse had been prohibited from such actions by his king and,

Actinotus helianthii, 1803–08, by John Lewin. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

Banksia serrata, 1803–08, by John Lewin. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

in the eyes of the British, the French commander was a true enlightenment gentleman who was unlikely to have done so. But if they had been better acquainted with him they would have known he did not espouse the theory – popular among his contemporaries – of the 'noble savage'.[40] La Pérouse was haunted by the deaths of his men in Samoa, especially that of Paul-Antoine de Langle, commander of *L'Astrolabe*. After these tragic events, he may well have been 'trigger happy' during his stay in Botany Bay.

The French were taking no risks. When camped on the north shore of Botany Bay, they set up what La Pérouse referred to as a 'very good retrenchment' behind which their boats could be safely built. The French commander confided in a letter to a friend, 'the Indians of New Holland ... are ... like all savages, very ill-natured and would set fire to our boats if they had means of doing so'.[41]

During their stay at Botany Bay, the French expedition lost another of its men when chaplain and naturalist Père Claude-Francois-Joseph Receveur died on 17 February. He was subsequently buried on the northern headland. It is generally thought that he died of wounds sustained when de Langle and the others were killed in Samoa, but it has been suggested – not altogether convincingly – that his mortal wounds may have been inflicted on the shores of Botany Bay.[42]

Indeed, as he was preparing to leave Botany Bay for the next phase of his journey, La Pérouse pondered on the folly of philosophers who praised 'savages', commenting that for the remainder of his voyage:

> I cannot guarantee that I will not fire a few guns at them, because I am quite convinced that only fear can put a stop to their evil intentions.[43]

The two French ships sailed out of Botany Bay on 10 March 1788 and were last seen sailing past Port Jackson. The final letter sent back to France from the expedition was written in Botany Bay and dispatched via the British on 7 February. The expedition was wrecked in the Solomon Islands and never returned to France, although the details of this tragedy were not established for many years.[44]

Not long after the French left, Phillip sent an officer to check that they really had gone. He regarded them cautiously, despite the apparent harmony between the two groups. In case more visitors were to sail past unexpectedly, 'boards of direction' were erected on Bare Island to let arriving ships know that the English were now at Port Jackson.[45]

On a visit to Botany Bay, English officers were perturbed to find that an inscription in memory of the French cleric, painted on a board and nailed to a tree, had been torn down. While the reasons the local Aboriginal people did this are unrecorded, such actions are hardly surprising, as memories of 'the harsh treatment' they received from the sailors of La Pérouse's ships persisted for many years. Phillip had other ideas, instructing one of the 'gentlemen' to copy the inscription. He had it 'engraved on a piece of copper and nailed in the place the other had been taken from.'[46]

Perouse, Jean Francois Galaup de la, celebre navigateur Francais [*French naval officer Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse*], c.1800, by N Mague. Jean-Francois de Galaup was an admirer of James Cook but was not a man who believed in the popular concept of the 'noble savage'. National Library of Australia

STRAGGLING ABOUT

The First Fleet's pitiful cargo of convicts became convenient scapegoats for almost everything that went wrong in the early days of white settlement in New South Wales. Not surprisingly, many were difficult to manage and the officers were convinced that their deteriorating relations with the Aboriginal people were purely the fault of convicts, who were described as 'straggling about' in places they were not supposed to be. The despised convicts' attacks on Botany Bay's 'children of nature', as Worgan called them, was at the root of the settlement's troubles, or so it seemed.[47] It was rarely admitted that the very act of dispossession itself was the heart of the problem.

However, the convicts were not as haphazard in their movements as the term 'straggling about' suggests. While some straggling involved attempts to escape to China – thought to be on the other side of the Blue Mountains – other excursions to the bush had more modest aims. They collected sarsaparilla (*Smilax glycyphylla*), a good source of vitamin C, to make sweet tea.[48] Hope of monetary gain was also a powerful incentive for other ventures from the camp. In February 1788, when Collins noted convicts 'straggling about', they were in fact trading with the people of the transports. Among items sold were Aboriginal spears, shields, swords and fishing lines, the loss of which, Collins commented, must have been 'attended with many inconveniences to the owners'.[49]

Inevitably, violence erupted and after the murder of convicts cutting rushes on 30 May 1788, Phillip and a party of twelve went in search of the Aboriginal men responsible. After 'traversing the country for more than 20 miles', they eventually came to the north shore of Botany Bay. There were people fishing in about twenty canoes, but when the Englishmen spent the night upon the beach, none joined them. Neither did they the next morning, when fifty canoes were sighted, drawn up on the beach. No men, women or children were to be seen anywhere.

As Phillip's party made its way back to the settlement along the coast, however, they discovered 'a great number of the natives, apparently more than could belong to that district, assembled at the mouth of a cave'. Unarmed, Phillip and the Aboriginal man who 'seemed to take the lead' approached each other and immediately the Englishmen found that they were surrounded by more than 200 men, amicably conversing. Women and children, who were usually kept discreetly in the background on such occasions, were brought forward to receive gifts. Convinced that the rush cutters' killers were not among this group, Phillip departed 'on the most friendly terms'.[50]

Over the next few months there were a number of attacks on 'straggling and unarmed' convicts. One man who strayed from a party collecting vegetables – perhaps Warrigal Greens (*Tetragonia tetragonoides*) – was murdered at Botany Bay, as Collins graphically described, by having 'his head beat to a jelly, a spear driven through it, another through his body, and one arm broken'. Between 26 January and 31 December 1788, Aboriginal men murdered four convicts and there were several non-fatal attacks.[51] There is no record of how many Aboriginal people were murdered.

In March 1789, after several Aboriginal assaults, sixteen convicts set out for Botany Bay, planning to attack the Indigenous men and steal their fishing gear. Their intended victims ambushed them, however, and those who managed to escape to Sydney were flogged.[52] Soon after, this rising tide of resistance was broken when the Aboriginal population of Sydney was unexpectedly decimated. In April and May 1789, an epidemic that created what naval officer William Bradley described as 'dreadful havock' struck the vulnerable population.[53]

Endemic disease was rife in eighteenth-century Britain and periodically there were severe epidemics. To people coming from such a society, the status of Aboriginal health looked good. Surgeon George Worgan commented on how they 'seemingly enjoy uninterrupted Health, and live to a great Age'.[54] However, this healthy population had no immunity to European diseases. The epidemic of 1789 not only killed a significant proportion of the Indigenous population but also destabilised their society. Only one case was recorded among the non-Indigenous population. This was a Native American, one of the crew of the *Supply*, who died from the disease on 8 May.[55]

The epidemic, thought to be smallpox – although there are strong arguments against this – spread to Botany Bay. On 11 June 1789, Bradley and his party met an Aboriginal man there who had 'just recovered of the small pox. He had a child with him and made signs that the mother of it had died of that disease.'[56]

When John Hunter returned, after completing his survey of Botany Bay on 30 September, he reported meeting few Aboriginal

Lieutenant William Bradley's Chart (No. 9), completed after a survey of Botany Bay and part of the Georges River in September 1788. First Fleeter William Bradley's hand-written journal, which contained this and other charts, is one of a number of important written records of early white settlement in Australia. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

people. In some of the caves, however, he had seen skeletons and loose bones of people he surmised had died of the smallpox.[57] Later, Obed West– a 'currency lad' of convict stock, and landowner and writer – also described how he had seen masses of scattered skulls and bones in a large overhanging rock, forming a cave at Little Bay. This was located on the 'south side of the bay, about 200 yards back from the beach'.[58]

Decimation from disease was a sad fate for a populous district of healthy people. Tench had noted earlier how on the north-west arm of Botany Bay he encountered 'a village, which contains more than a dozen houses, and perhaps five times that number of people'. Indeed, members of the First Fleet were surprised when the number of Indigenous people in the Sydney district was greater than first thought.[59]

TRANSIENT VISITORS

It is uncertain how many Indigenous people remained in the district in the years that followed, but some did. On entering Botany Bay in 1798 Dr Benjamin Carter, surgeon on board the *Ann & Hope*, recalled seeing Indigenous people sitting around a fire on the south side of the bay, while on the north side 'numbers of natives armed with spears [were] running and walking on the sandy beach'. Men crossed over from Point Solander and 'two natives encouraged by kind words' boarded the ship.[60]

There was little permanent white settlement at Botany Bay or along the coast north to Port Jackson at this time. Only transient visitors came to the district, despite there being a road to Botany Bay from the very earliest days of first settlement. This route, according to local historian Alec Protos, followed the natural ridge extending from the present Oxford Street in the city to the South Coogee area.[61] It was probably this road, which was undoubtedly an Aboriginal path, that some of the 'gentlemen of the settlement' took when they walked overland from Sydney to Botany Bay in September 1788. John Hunter commented, 'This route being now well known, and the path well trodden, it was not an unpleasant walk'.[62]

A few months before his overland exploration, Hunter had first taken this eight- or nine-mile route 'across the land, and near the sea shore', describing how it:

> abounds with high trees, and little or no underwood; but ... it is all thick, low woods or shrubberies, barren heaths, and swamps; the land near the sea, although covered in many places with wood, is rocky from the waterside to the very summit of the hills.[63]

The men who went on this walk were to meet boats that had been dispatched there in preparation for Hunter's survey of the bay. The party tackled this job towards the end of September 'while the weather was cool and pleasant'. The survey was completed in about ten days and some exploration was made of the Georges and Cooks rivers.[64]

From the first days of white settlement, part-time farmer Arthur Phillip did not consider the coastal districts of Sydney suitable for settlement. He wrote that the 'sea-coast does not offer any situation ... which is calculated for a town whose inhabitants are to be employed in agriculture'.[65] With the search for arable land a priority, the country between Botany Bay and Port Jackson generally did not impress and was described in less than glowing terms. When John Hunter was governor, after visiting settlers along the Georges River he walked from Botany Bay back to Sydney, 'between which places there was nothing but barren and uneven ground, but everywhere covered with the most beautiful flowering heath'.[66]

Flowering heath could not feed the hungry settlers. Ironically, this land that Phillip described as 'a poor sandy heath, full of swamps' was – as the author of one of the first published histories of Australia commented in 1889 – 'largely occupied by market gardens' in the nineteenth century.[67]

The City of Randwick, probably more than any other part of Sydney, demonstrates in its history one of the world's great culture clashes. This occurred first in 1770 and again in 1788, as two of Europe's dominant eighteenth-century maritime powers intruded upon traditional Indigenous society. While the subsequent appropriation of land had a devastating impact, undoubtedly the greatest shock to Sydney's Indigenous peoples was the epidemic of 1789, which is likely to have killed half of the population.