

# I - Aboriginal Background

(Elaine Ayers.....)

## 1.1. Resume:

### 1.1.1. Overview:

Sydney's history is tragic. The indigenous people completely gone within fifteen years through chicken pox and planned annihilation by settlers.

One suspects that the white man's 'rape of the land' needs addressing spiritually....and that perhaps 'repentance' and forgiveness is somehow not sufficient. (Parallel to Maoris in New Zealand and dishonouring of the Treaty of Waitangi by the whites ?)

It is very difficult to find any trace of their totem customs etc. The book "Pemulway" is the closest to the history of the time.

Redfern has always had a criminal/violent element. The "push-gangs" etc (whites). The aboriginals use it as a meeting place in Sydney. Aboriginal services are all based there:

i.e. Health, Medical Centre, Legal Centre, Housing Company,  
Dance Company, Radio Redfern, Aboriginal Pastors etc

Redfern aborigines usually have come from Western/North West NSW. Traditionally there has been suspicion between Redfern and La Perouse blacks.

La Perouse was the mission land (reserve). This is now owned by the La Perouse people. The reserve also housed an orphanage for children but these children could have been brought from anywhere in Australia let alone NSW. The purpose was to 'break up' family units even up to 10-15 years ago. This orphanage now houses services for aboriginal children and is run and owned by aborigines. There is also an adoption service which helps people to 'find' their families. La Perouse people have links usually with people up and down coastal area i.e. Newcastle to Shoalhaven.

The Randwick Municipality houses University, Race Course etc and many if not most of Sydney's organised criminals. Municipality is from Queens Park Kensington to Peninsula (La Perouse). There is a lot of witchcraft in this area - apparently a coven in Waverley cemetery.

Of interest:

The aboriginal myth says that the Hawkesbury was formed by a goanna (could be the totem) digging and waterways formed. "Good spirits" moved down the river after him. Spirits were acknowledged to be water.

### 1.1.2. *Some Key Aspects of Aboriginal Culture:*

#### View of Life:

Spiritual (aministic and personal), totemistic and historical

Believe in a united world of body and spirit for every form of life in the land, both living and non-living

#### Other beliefs/myths:

Difficult to substantiate.....but include

##### The Sky-Heroes:

Supreme male deity - (or one mythical being in SE Aust pantheon)

Usually referred to as father, or all-father

Source of clever mans power - and owner of male initiation rites

Is in the 'sky' - place seen as possessing much quartz crystal  
and fresh water

For Sydney area - known as Baiami

##### The "Mother-Goddess" Cult:

Two main concepts - 'fertility mother (or goddess)' and 'rainbow  
serpent'

Fertility mother - 'One mother for all people everywhere'

Came from north with husband

Left 'spirit children' to become ancestors for diff't tribes

Ritual of rebirth - she becomes identified with the female rainbow  
serpent

#### Traditional way of life:

Established in the Dreamtime by mythical Beings

Believe they are descended from these mythical Beings

Each tribe has special symbol (totem) - represents spiritual attachment to a  
particular ancestral Being

For David Gulpill, for example, his tribes's totem is the Goanna

#### Family Life:

Very important - but unlike white man

Family name taken from mother (woman who creates life by giving birth)

Family consists of all related to same totem

**Death:**

Usually seen as being caused by 'malignant activity - or magical - on part of enemy'  
...rather than death by natural causes.

One concern of community - punishment of those responsible

Not the end of life - last ceremony in present life - soul reborn

Soul lives on - finds new body to inhabit - reincarnation

Spirits of dead - also believed to travel (eg across the sea, to 'departure' point'  
such as a mountain etc)



Extract from personal diary of  
Ethnological Notes by Mr Bernard Hornishaw....

Extracts from "Hamilarai" F. CARSH "TON"  
27 DAY STREET  
BRUMMOYNE

On Friday Dec 22nd 1939 Mrs Monaghan of 138  
Oxford Street Paddington lent me a book to  
peruse entitled "Hamilarai" and other Australian  
languages by the Rev William Ridley, published by  
Thomas Richards, Gov Printer Sydney 1875

Deity

The Greater Baiamee.  
Traditions, that there is  
heaven and earth, who  
has already been sp  
to make or build is  
Maker who created  
generally invisible  
in human form.  
gifts and he will  
and reward th

"Hamilarai"  
Kamoi. B. W. A.  
Liverpool P.

Surveys  
extract.

re Deity and the Flood

Many aborigines depicted their god  
in a beautiful rock crystal  
because they said that man was  
too wicked to represent a Deity  
told by Rev C. J. Felzer 12.10.32  
Some tribes of Aborigines believed  
in a great flood and according  
to their tradition everything on  
the World was destroyed excepting  
2 couples, a man and a woman  
and a Bandicoot.

after the flood had subsided the  
man and the woman tried to make  
a fire, but every piece of bark  
and leaves being wet they did  
not succeed until the bandi-  
coot dug up some dry roots which  
enabled them to make a fire

Told by Rev C. J. Felzer 12.10.32

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*Bibliography:*

" Aborigines of the Sydney Area" .....The Australian Museum

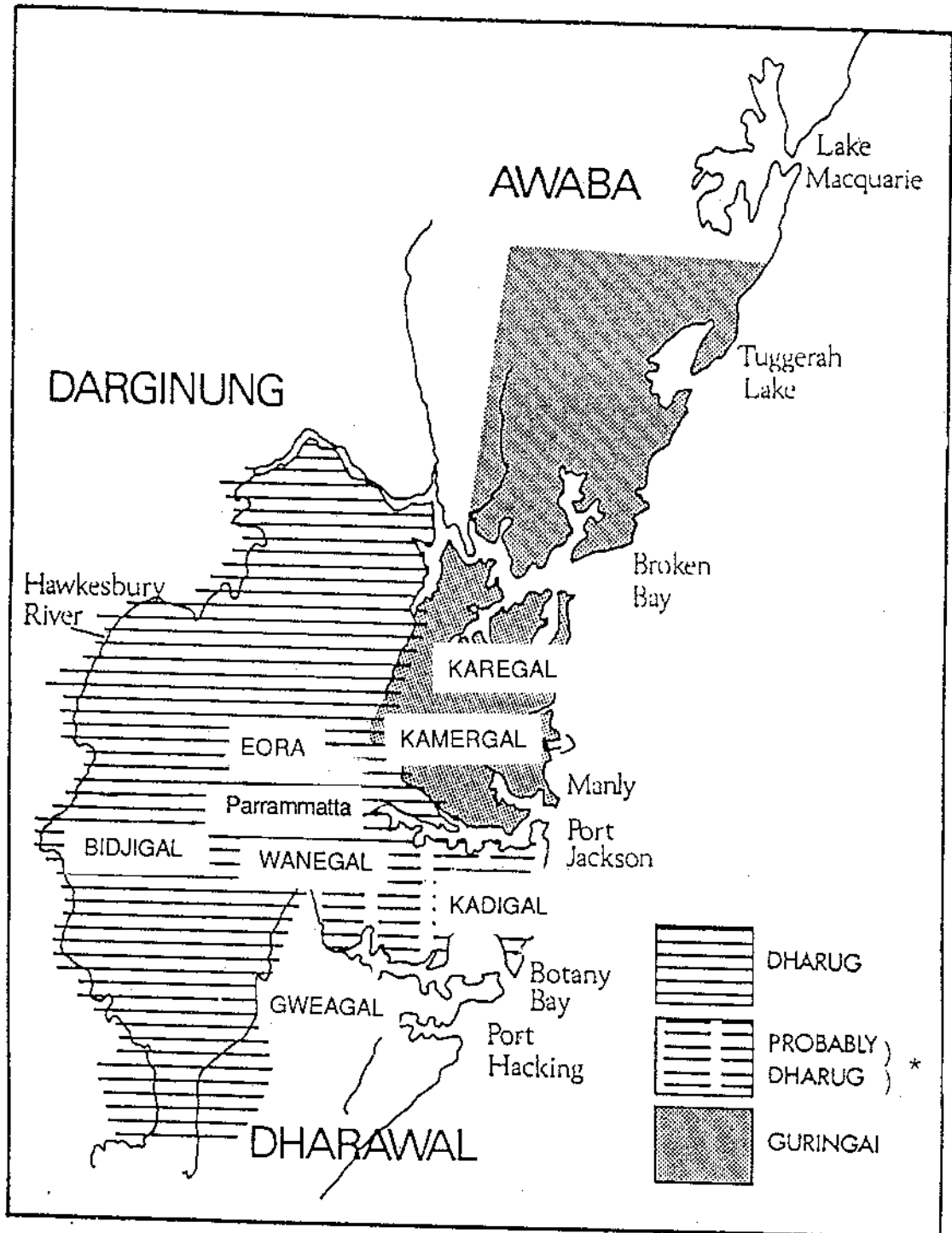
" The Aboriginees of the Sydney District - Before 1788 " by Peter Turbet  
(Kangaroo Press)

" A Collection of Aboriginal Legends " introduced by David Gulpiill

"The Legend of Pemulwuy " by Eric Willmott

" The Australian Aborigines" by Professor A. P. Elken

1.2. Maps (position of some Australian Aboriginal Tribes):



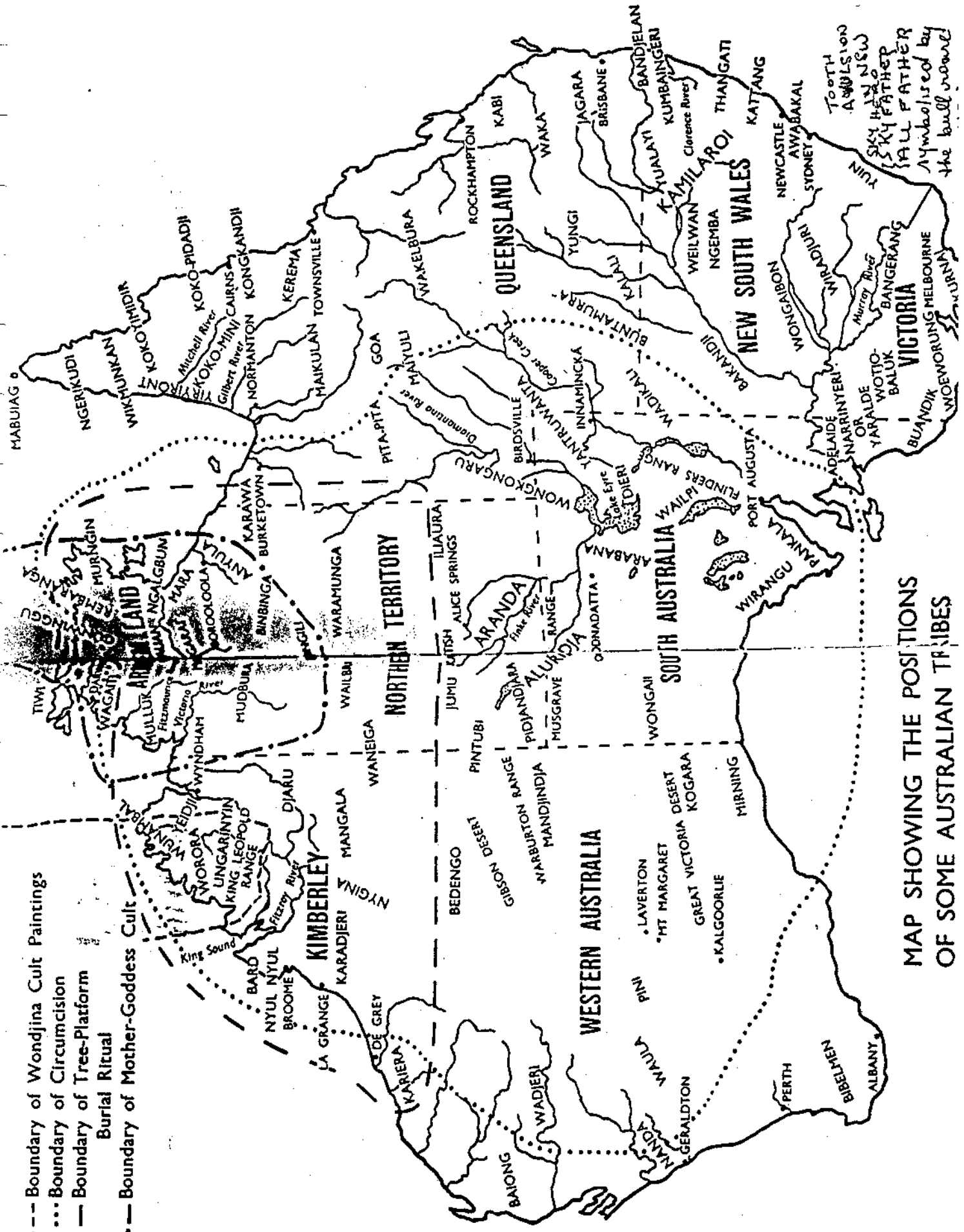
EORA - Means People

\* Completely Lost

Sub-groups (Area around)

- Karegal - Broken Bay
- Kamergal - Balgowlah
- Bidgigal - Parrammatta
- Wanegal -
- Gweagal - Georges River

- Boundary of Wondjina Cult Paintings
- ..... Boundary of Circumcision
- - - Boundary of Tree-Platform Burial Ritual
- - - Boundary of Mother-Goddess Cult



MAP SHOWING THE POSITIONS OF SOME AUSTRALIAN TRIBES

### 1.3. The Legend of Pemulwuy:

(This is the 'background' introduction to a novel written by Eric Willmot. The researcher Elaine Ayers has highlighted various sections in italics)

*The name Pemulwuy means earth man of the earth.* Pemulwuy lived in Australia in the last half of the eighteenth century. He was born around 1756 to a *people who believed that their world was brought into being by a transcendental creator who took the temporal form of the rainbow.* He died in 1802. He was the rainbow warrior. This novel was conceived out of his legend and the historical events of the period between 1788 and 1802.

The legend of Pemulwuy is part of the belief system and oral history of the Aboriginal people of the east coast of Australia. It is also part of the history of all modern Australians. *The city of Sydney is built upon his land.*

The initial creation of this great modern city occurred during the last 14 years of Pemulwuy's life. For modern Australians this has always been a period of stories, hidden truths and mysteries. Even the language we use today is embedded with words from that time, such as dingo, gin, womera and bogey. *Boong is a general derogatory term used by some white Australians towards any dark skinned race and comes from the Eora word meaning anus or arse.*

Pemulwuy is a fundamental part of that mystery. His story is not different in substance from that of other Aboriginal-Australian patriots like 'Yagan' and 'Jundamurra'. Such men resisted the British invasion and colonial rule in Australia in the 18th and 19th centuries. *There are two things that set Pemulwuy apart from his later compatriots.* The first was that he *led the Eora people in the first major response to the British invasion*, and fought the British for twelve long years until his death in 1802. *The Aboriginal Australian resistance is said to have been broken by Governor King in 1805* (Bridges 1920) when Pemulwuy's son Tedbury was captured and became the first Australian prisoner of war.

*The second difference was the attitude of Pemulwuy's enemies towards him.* The British sought not only to destroy him physically, they, and some of their descendants, *attempted to obliterate the very evidence of his existence.* *Until recently, Pemulwuy's name has never appeared in any white Australian history,* yet he lives on in the unpublished records of his enemies, and in the minds of Aboriginal-Australians.

*A special kind of mythology has grown up around Pemulwuy.* In both legend and history he is described as having *unusual powers* and a connection with the *supernatural.* In the television episode, Warriors, from the Special Broadcasting Service, Rainbow Serpent series in 1985, Bob Mazza, an Aboriginal actor, describes Pemulwuy as a '*clever man*'. In Aboriginal-Australian terms this refers to people involved in activities associated with the supernatural. In March 1798 Collins wrote of a myth that had grown up around Pemulwuy.

*'A strange idea was found to prevail among the natives respecting the savage Pemulwuy, which was likely to prove fatal to him in the end. Both he and they entertained an opinion that, from his having been frequently wounded, he could not be killed by our firearms. Through this fancied security, he was said to be at the head of every party that attacked the maize grounds'.* ("Account of the English Colony in NSW" 1789 - Collins, Volume II 1802, p.20).

George Barrington, Chief Constable at Parrammatta, had reported the same phenomenon the previous year.





Pemulwuy and the group he led were clearly at war with the British. His 12 year campaign and persistent attacks on crops and towns were well beyond the acts of outlaws or thieves. They were acts of war, carried out by a people who were determined not to surrender their land or sovereignty to an invader.

As the *Europeans* explored and expanded the earth in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, they *created many enemies* - some weak, some powerful - but *none more implacably hostile or uncompromising as the Australian Pemulwuy.*

Governor Phillip Gidley King in consigning Pemulwuy's head to England wrote:

'...Altho a terrible pest to the colony, he was a brave and independent character...' (Governor King to Sir Joseph Banks 1802, HR NSW)

He was indeed *their noblest enemy in Australia. Yet to the eternal shame of the British soldiers, they dishonoured his body.*

In 1788 the British landed on the shores of the bay of Kamay, now called Botany Bay. The district surrounding that bay and the great harbour of Tuhbowgule, around which the *city of Sydney* is now built, was *inhabited by a nation of indigenous Australians who called themselves Eora.*

When the French and the British found their way to the east coast of Australia, the continent was divided into precisely bounded areas of land. Each of these areas was populated by an ethnic group of Aboriginal-Australian people. These people had inhabited the continent of Australia since the beginning of human time.

These Australian groups were all of the same general racial descent, but each spoke a different language and were culturally distinct from one another. The islands linking Australia with Papua New Guinea were inhabited by another racially different group of indigenous Australians. These people are known today as Torres Strait Islanders. Together they formed a community of nations on the continent and its surrounding islands. The area of land that belonged to each of these nations varied in size, depending mainly on the food-producing capacity of the region. The land of some descent groups was larger than several European nations together. Others, however, were relatively small.

*The Eora land area was approximately 1,800 square kilometres in size. It extended along the coast from the Hawkesbury River in the north to the Georges River in the south. It extended inland to the present towns of Campbelltown and Camden, and a little to the north of the Shoalhaven River* (Ellis, 1980). (See map in section 2.2. earlier).

The Eora people were structured into a number of sub-groups, who spoke closely related languages or dialects. These sub-groups occupied different parts of the Eora land, and generally had somewhat different economies. The *Kamergal*, for example, tended to concentrate on *fishing*, while the *Bidjigal* were more concerned with *hunting animals* that inhabited the forests of the region. An approximate location of the different Eora groups is shown in map in section 2.2. earlier. This map also shows *the two major adjoining groups of Tharawal and Daruk.*

The first Australians to come into contact with the British were the coastal groups, and they were closely observed by them. The people who lived in the hinterland areas were less well known, and *Pemulwuy is believed to have been a member of such a group* - the Bidjigal. He is described by British sources as a woodsman who roamed over a large area from Castle Hill and Parramatta, down to the shores of Botany Bay. He is also reported to have travelled as far north as the Hawkesbury River. He is described as being of a tall athletic build with a pronounced caste in one eye.

The British, under Governor Arthur Phillip, in 1788 made several unsuccessful attempts to communicate with the Australians, and in desperation captured a man named *Arabanu* (Tench 1961; Hunter 1973). He was reportedly treated well and kept in close association with Phillip and Hunter (who later became Governor of NSW) He became "quite one of the Governor's family" (Bradley 1969, p. 168).

Arabanu was kept tied up by the leg until he showed that he would remain at the settlement when he was freed. He was exposed to much of the behaviour of the British, including a flogging which he was compelled to watch. To this event "...he displayed...symptoms of disquiet and terror" (Mulvaney 1985, p. 13).

Arabanu experienced much of the new British foods. Some such as tea he enjoyed, but alcohol he resisted with "disgust and abhorrence" (Mulvaney 1985, p.13) Arabanu died from smallpox on 18th May 1789, ending the first contact between these two races of people from opposite ends of the earth.

The next contact was quite different and was with three intelligent young indigenous Australian men of some status in their own society. These three were *Bennelong, Pemulwuy and Colbee* (called Koobee in the novel).

Bennelong's association with the British is well documented and described by Tench, Collins et al. Bennelong first appears in records in 1789 whereas *Pemulwuy always remains just out of focus*. He is first mentioned in 1790 when he is accused by Bennelong of killing a missing convict. In November 1790 Phillip's gamekeeper, John Macintyre, was speared in an unprovoked attack by Pemulwuy. Macintyre declared that "he had even quitted his arms to induce them to look upon him as a friend, when the savage threw his spear at about the distance of ten yards with a skill that was fatally unerring". When the spear was extracted it was found to have entered his body under the left arm, to a depth of seven and a half inches. It was armed for five or six inches from the point with sharp, jagged pieces of shells fastened in gum (Collins, Volume I, p.118). Macintyre died in January 1791 and confessed on his deathbed to his own depredations against the Australians.

On 13 December 1790, Phillip ordered an unusually large military force out to apprehend Pemulwuy and his companions. The force consisted of two captains, two other subalterns, three sergeants, two corporals, one drummer and forty privates attended by two surgeons. The force was led jointly by Captain Tench of the Marine Corps and Captain Hill of the NSW Corps. *Phillip ordered them to bring back the amputated heads of any six adult males of Pemulwuy's group*.

This was a truly remarkable situation. Phillip had previously attempted to befriend the native Australians and, indeed, his *direction from the British Government* was "by every means possible to open an intercourse with the natives" and this was to be accomplished in a humanitarian way.

Phillip's attitude had certainly *hardened* by 1790 and it is believed that Pemulwuy was responsible for this. According to Phillip, Pemulwuy's group had by that time been *responsible for killing or wounding seventeen English people*.

White Australian history books record all of these events by saying something to the effect that Phillip was angered when his gamekeeper was speared by a native. This first military expedition against the Australians was, as described in the novel, unsuccessful, as was a second. No white Australian historian has described these expeditions as military operations.

At this time Pemulwuy is described as an established leader in Eora society. This means that he must have been at least thirty years of age. He is also described as being shaven, which indicates that, like Bennelong, he must have attempted to relate to the British in other than military terms. Bidjigal men were normally unshaven, as was Pemulwuy in the later period.

Most of the ensuing events described in the novel, and the times of occurrence, are based directly on historical records. The actual dates of the attacks on Toongabbie and Parramatta have been transposed for dramatic purposes. These accounts are every sketchy, particularly those relating to actual battles. The casualties involved in these conflicts were probably higher than suggested in the novel. In a four and a half year period at the extreme boundary of the battlefield - the Hawkesbury River - John Francis Molloy stated " that 26 white persons were killed and 13 wounded ". (Dunbabin 1935, p.107).

*The Australian casualties from armed combat and sickness throughout the period must have been enormous, because the entire Eora nation was destroyed. The anthropological nature and the social structures and organisation of the Eora society of the time are recreated as accurately as is possible today.* In most parts of the novel this is explained in the text. In some parts this was not possible. For example, the somewhat puzzling series of events at the Tharawal camp of Wingikari, when Weuong is challenged over the woman O'some, is an example. This scene illustrates the characteristic Aboriginal-Australian brother-sister reaction in such a situation. The somewhat unusual resolution of the situation involves two further mechanisms used in such conflicts. First Awabakal spears O'some as carefully as he can, thus removing the need for mortal combat between the two men. Finally Weuong's adversary uses the ethic of generosity to preserve his own honour in relinquishing his claim to O'some. The reader will also realise that marriage was not celebrated at the time of consummation. The important event was the arrangement.

The reader is given some idea of the depth and richness of old Australian mythology. Little is known today about specific Eora mythology, and some more general traditional Australian mythology is drawn into the novel. The Aboriginal-Australian etiquette of not using the name of the immediate dead is preserved throughout the novel.

The form of language, both Australian and English, is interpreted from writings of the times. Some statements in dialogue of the novel are taken directly from these records. These include statements by Pemulwuy, and other Australians as well as the British. A glossary of language is appended.

The Eora language was reconstructed as well as possible from oral and written memory. It is a classical, rather than poetic language, similar in some ways to Latin. It is used in this novel for real human communication, expressing at times concepts which are uniquely old Australian and not found in English. The Eora language is, however, now, extinct. The readers of this novel will possibly be the last human beings to use it.

Names used in the novel are historically based, as are the characters. Some names, both British and Australian, have been changed for various reasons.

Although Awabakal people were brought to Sydney, the character Kiraban is a creation of the author. Narawe is likewise an invention, although she is modelled on Pemulwuy's daughter. These two represent an act of faith by those modern young Aboriginal men and women who hurt for a past that cannot be changed, and who would willingly have given their lives beside Pemulwuy if they had lived in his time.

The term Australia was coined by Matthew Flinders during the period covered by this novel. It was probably derived from the old name of Terra Australis.

The author occasionally uses the term Australians to refer to Aboriginal Australian groups, which include more than the Eora people. At this point in Australian history it is only the native inhabitants of the country who could be legitimately referred to by this name.

The British characters tell their own story, from their own history. Where accounts in the novel differ from history, names are usually changed. I believe that some of these people may have been sorely judged by their own kind. John Macarthur is one such person. His regard for the native Australians might have been better than portrayed in this novel. On at least one occasion he criticised another officer, Lieutenant Neil MacKellar, who ordered soldiers to kill blacks whenever they met them. Macarthur, then a member of a military jury, asked by what authority he gave these bloodthirsty orders. Mackellar replied that "they were received verbally from the Governor" (Dunbabin 1935, p.107). This novel, however, represents Macarthur's character in the way that he has been judged by his own people in modern literature. The novel leaves only one possible suggestion that there may have been more to the man. This is expressed dramatically when Macarthur says, as he stands over the imprisoned Pemulwuy, "God ! have we actually made an enemy of the earth itself."

The British characters of Phillip, Ross, Grose, Hunter, King, Marshall, Macarthur and Collins do truly represent the people of their notes. Tench and Dawes do not. Watkin Tench was the man who led the first unsuccessful military expedition against Pemulwuy. His was an intimate contact, yet his rather dry literary account of his life in NSW suspends belief of this most important role of the British soldier who confronted Pemulwuy. Tench had a distinguished military career after leaving NSW. Sometime long after leaving he must have recalled that he was the first to be sent out to bring back the head of the worthy enemy, Pemulwuy. Tench was an intelligent, sensitive man and perhaps he deliberately avoided his duty in this matter. Both Tench and Dawes of history were replaced in the novel by Tench and Carpenter, two British soldiers who portray a specific and intimate response to Pemulwuy.

McDonald and Cawley are similarly fictitious characters created from an historical base for the same purpose as Tench and Carpenter. The Australian character Colbee is replaced in the novel by Koobee for similar reasons.

*Records indicate that many more Irish and other escaped convicts joined with, and fought beside, Pemulwuy than are described in the novel. What became of them will probably never be known. They witnessed the bleeding and total tragic destruction of the Eora society.*

*By far the most puzzling aspect of this part of Australian history is that **until now it has never been told**. It has laid for 200 years in records and legends and yet the **spectre of these events haunts the racial memory of all modern Australians**. Grassby, in his book, *Tyranny of Prejudice* (1984), provides an understanding, if not a reason, for this situation. He points out that the *Irish revolt at Vinegar Hill*, two years after Pemulwuy's death, also *remained hidden from history until quite recently*.*

*'It is interesting to see how the authorities attempted to eradicate all evidence of this battle in a superb Orwellian demonstration of rewriting history. First of all they wiped from the map of Australia any reference to Vinegar Hill. The district was renamed Rouse Hill. Even half a century later when the local people sought to have their post office described as Vinegar Hill this was denied. No reference to the battle appears in any textbook, historical record, or anything which needs an official explanation. So successfully did the authorities expunge all knowledge of the battle, and the reasons for it and its consequences, that it took 179 years for the first public commemoration of the battle to take place'. (Grassby 1984, p.20)*

*The battle of Vinegar Hill was in fact first celebrated at the site on 5th March 1983 !!*

*This was indeed a conspiracy of silence. The same that was applied to Pemulwuy's resistance. It was apparently not in the interests of a crookedly intent or racist establishment to promote such parts of the Australian story. If this is true, then these people have stolen from generations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal-Australians a heritage as important and as heroic as that of any other nation on earth.*

(Eric Willmot)

## 2.4. Aborigines of the Sydney Area

(Extract from "Aborigines of the Sydney Area" - The Australian Museum - Sydney)

Our information on the Aborigines who lived in the Sydney area before the white man arrived comes almost entirely from journals written by the first white settlers and through excavation of camp sites around Port Jackson.

The local food resources were plentiful and the Aborigines had little difficulty in obtaining sufficient food for their needs. There was also plenty of wood, bone and shell for the manufacture of artefacts and weapons. The only resource which was lacking was stone suitable for the making of tools. For this reason the Sydney Aborigines employed very few stone tools and what stone they did use had to be brought in from elsewhere.

### **The Tribes and their Foods:**

There were two main tribes in the Sydney area. The Guringai (sometimes spelt Kuringgai) lived on the coast between Port Jackson and Lake Macquarie. The Dharug lived inland between the Guringai and the foothills of the Great Dividing Range. A group often described as the Darginung was probably a northern part of the Dharug. We do not have enough information on the people who lived between Port Jackson and Botany Bay to decide whether they were more closely related to the Dharug or to the Guringai.

#### *The Guringai:*

The coastal Aborigines relied heavily on the sea and river estuaries for their food. All members of the tribe performed the task of fishing, often at night, using lighted sticks or bark as torches. The men used barbed fishing spears, and the women fished with hooks and lines. They caught jewfish, snapper, mullet, mackerel, whiting, dory, rockcod, leatherjackets and many other types, but would never eat shark or stingray. Crayfish were also eaten and these were caught in small hooped nets.

The Aborigines of the coast also ate shellfish, such as rock oysters, mud oysters, mussels and cockles. Most of the shellfish were collected by the women.

During the winter months the variety of fish available to the Guringai diminished, because several species migrate northwards at this time. Therefore, during the winter, the Guringai ate more land foods than they did in the summer. However, even in the winter fishing was the most important food resource.

The land foods eaten by the Guringai included meat from kangaroos, birds and possums. Plants were also very important. Particularly interesting was their use of the poisonous *macrozamia* seeds. If not prepared properly, these are deadly. The Guringai would soak the kernels in water for seven or eight days, changing the water every day, and then roast them. In this way the seeds could be eaten without fear of poisoning. Other plant foods eaten throughout the year included the wild fig, the yam, fern roots, and the heart of the cabbage-tree palm.

### *The Dharug:*

The inland Aborigines had a much more varied diet than the Guringai. They ate fish from the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers, eels and shellfish from the swamps and creeks, kangaroos and wallabies, lizards and possums.

One method used to hunt the kangaroo was for a large group of people to assemble and form a circle of two or three kilometres diameter. They would walk slowly towards the centre, driving all the encircled game before them. Finally when the circle was quite small, the Dharug would set fire to the small area left surrounded, and spear the animals as they fled.

### **Stone Tools:**

There is no mention in the early journals of stone tools other than the hatchet and death-spear used by the coastal Aborigines of the Sydney area. The death spear had a single point, barbed with jagged pieces of stone. It was designed so that when the point entered the body of the victim the pieces of stone dropped out and remained inside the body, thus ensuring death. Sometimes lumps of the Hawkesbury sandstone were used as anchors for the canoes (tied onto fishing lines) or as missiles. However, these were not worked in any way. For most purposes shell was used instead of stone.

Nevertheless, archaeologists have shown that many types of stone tools *were* formerly used on the coast. Aboriginal camp sites found in sand dunes at Bondi, Mona Vale, Curl Curl, Maroubra, Narrabeen and Manly contained chipped stone 'knives' including forms known as Bondi points and eloueras, and various kinds of scrapers and flakes. Most of the stone for these tools came from the Singleton coal measures to the north of the Sydney area, and consists of red and yellow cherts.

(Bondi, Maroubra....supply for Redfern and La Perouse people).

### **Ceremonies:**

One of the most important ceremonies performed by the Guringai was the male initiation ceremony, at which the old men, dressed as kangaroos, dingoes and other animals, carried out many dances meant to help the boys become great hunters and fighters. In addition to instructing the boys in the myths and laws of the Guringai, an important part of the ceremony was the knocking out of the upper left incisor. All Guringai males had to undergo this ceremony before they could be considered adult men.

Most females had the first two joints of the little finger of the left hand removed while they were babies. It was stated that this assisted them in line fishing.

The Guringai had two methods of disposing of the dead: young people were buried without any specific ritual, but the older ones were ceremonially cremated on a funeral pyre, the bones being subsequently buried.



One of the ceremonies practised between the Sydney Aborigines and neighbouring tribesmen was the *ritual fight*. This was performed when someone had done some wrong and needed to be punished. The wrongdoer stood at one end of an *open piece of ground* (in Sydney this was at the spot where *Hyde Park* is now situated) and with a shield he had to ward off spears thrown at him by the wronged man and his kinsmen. After all the spears had been used, the wrongdoer would put down his shield, gather up the used spears and return them to the throwers, so that the fight could begin again. In most cases the aim was not to kill the wrongdoer but merely to wound him slightly, usually in the thigh. Only when the wrongdoer was an enemy from a distant tribe would the fighting become really violent.

#### **Rock Art:**

The best surviving examples of Aboriginal culture in the Sydney region are the rock carvings and paintings which are found throughout the area. There are numerous representatives of figures which Europeans have identified as kangaroos, men, whales, fish, and ancestor figures. No one is quite sure just what these engravings and paintings meant to the people who made them. Some writers suggest that they were for hunting *magic*, others that they represent *ancestors and totemic beings*.

The Aborigines made the engravings by punching holes in the rock, and then joining them up to make lines of irregular, bumpy grooves. Many of those around Sydney have been made by whites; smooth, regular lines cut into the Hawkesbury sandstone are unlikely to have been made by Aborigines.

## 2.5. The Dreamtime - (Gulpilli):

*(This is the 'Introduction' to a Collection of Aboriginal Legends which was compiled with the help of David Gulpilli)*

All the world's peoples have a concept of how the world was formed. The Aboriginals believe that, in the beginning, the earth was featureless, flat and grey. There were no mountain ranges, no rivers, no billabongs, no birds or animals - in fact not one living thing. Then long, long ago came the Dreamtime. The Dreamtime was a time when giant creatures rose up out of the grey plains where they had been slumbering for countless ages. These mythical Beings looked like animals or plants or insects, but they behaved just like humans. They wandered across the vast grey wastes, digging for water and searching for food and as they searched, because of their giant size, they made huge ravines and rivers in the land. Thus the world took on the shape it has today.

Aboriginal people believe that in the Dreamtime the traditional Aboriginal way of life was established by these mythical Beings; this way of life is still followed in traditional Aboriginal society today. They believe that their ancestors were taught about their tribal lands by the mythical Beings, and were told how they, as descendants of those Beings, should behave. This was their Dreamtime, and this teaching is as important to them as the Ten Commandments were to the ancient Hebrews.

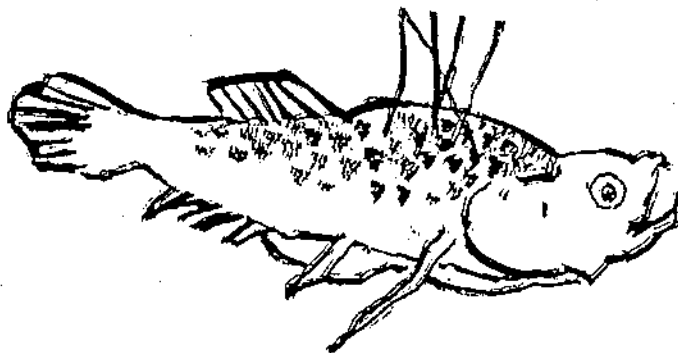
The Dreamtime ended, no one knows how or why, and time and life as we know it began. For Aboriginal people the land has a very special meaning, for all over the land there are features which are reminders of those giant Beings of the Dreamtime. When they see a mountain or river, a rock or a tree, they think of the mythical Beings that had a part in their own creation.

The Aboriginals believe that they are directly descended from these mythical Beings. When the Dreamtime ended, the people were left with a social and cultural heritage which came from their ancestors. All the rites and ceremonies are, and always were, aimed at preserving this heritage. Their ancestors from the Dreamtime also gave them possession of tribal lands, and hence tribal land, and all forms of life contained within it, are regarded as a sacred trust.



The bonds with the mythical Beings of the Dreamtime are such that they believe in a united world of body and spirit for every form of life in the land, both living and non-living. This then means that the rocks, rivers and waterholes are more than just a reminder or a symbol of the Dreamtime; they represent reality and eternal truth.

The legends in this book are some of the stories about the ancestors from the Dreamtime. The legends portray all sorts of human behaviour, including the less endearing ones such as vanity, lying, cruelty, trickery and cheating. There is a moral in these myths. As you listen to the antics of 'The First Barramundi Fish', or of 'Mooia the Pelican', you are warned by the characters' downfall of what might happen to you should you fall into the same temptation.



To non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal mythology can be confusing because the characters are non-human Beings, but behave like humans. Many of the myths seem only to be concerned with a particular animal or bird. However in Aboriginal culture most of these birds and animals have a symbolic meaning of great importance. For instance, the Sun is a woman; she creates life and she is often symbolised by water, fire, earth and red ochre; the Moon is male and controls the tides and seasonal cycles - he is often symbolised by snake, dog, frog and also water.

Some people may find these legends hard to believe, but because they do not seem real to one person, this does not mean that they are not real to another. Indeed Aboriginals may find it as difficult to believe the Bible story of Moses parting the waters of the Red Sea as Europeans may find it difficult to believe that the Wonga Pigeon's blood changed the colour of all the waratah flowers. To those who really want to believe, both these events *did* take place.

Aboriginals believe that each tribe is descended from the Beings of the Dreamtime. *Today every Aboriginal has a special symbol - they are called totems - which represents this spiritual attachment to a particular ancestral Being.* Gulpilil's tribe is the Mandalbingu tribe from northern Arnhem Land and his symbol is the Goanna. He believes that his family is descended from the supernatural Being represented by the Goanna in the Dreamtime. This belief is very important to him, and the goanna of today constantly reminds him of that spiritual ancestor.

These symbols are also important because they help to show man's unity with nature. All animals, birds, insects, reptiles, plants and other life forms, including man, are part of nature; it is only outward forms that are different.

*"Cooma el ngruwar, ngruwar el cooma, illa booka mer ley urrie urrie."*

*"One is all, all is one, the soul will not die."*

In tribal society, the family is very important, but the Aboriginal idea of the family is quite different from our own. The family name is taken from the mother, not the father, because it is the woman who creates life by giving birth. The family is also different because of the totems. A person in another tribe with the same totem is regarded as a brother (or sister or uncle as the case may be), even though he or she was not born of the same parents. Thus Gulpilil has many brothers, sisters, uncles, mothers and fathers ! These totems help all Aboriginals to have close bonds with each other. With so many relations there's always a wonderful and deep sense of security, warmth and protection for every child. It's like having a big net of family all around you.

Most of you who read this book go to school to learn from a teacher. Not so for Aboriginal children in traditional society. They have all their lessons at home and their 'teacher' might be father, uncle, mother or aunt. Often the 'lessons' consist of watching or even taking part in the corroborees which are the tribes entertainment. Children watch the performances of older boys and girls, and men and women, and see them make up dances and rhythms as they go along, according to their mood at the time. By taking part in these occasions, the children begin to learn some of the special but difficult dance movements which later, as adults, they will perform in ancient dances or ceremonies - so they are learning and having fun at the same time. This also means that they become very close to their 'teachers'.



The core of the Aboriginal tribal culture is music, dance, ceremonies and story-telling and all these are closely bound up with the land and nature in sacred ceremonies and rituals. These ties are strengthened by their spiritual ancestors.

To the Aboriginal, death is not the end of life. Death is the last ceremony in this present life; then the soul is reborn, thus all living people are reincarnations of the dead. The soul lives on and finds a new body to inhabit. This belief in reincarnation provides a direct link back to their ancestors of the Dreamtime.

This collection of Aboriginal legends has been compiled with the help of Gulpilil. He learnt these stories from the elders of his tribe when he was a small boy living in Arnhem Land. The photographs were taken during the filming of the television series, The Dreamtime.