

Wallumedegal

The lost Aboriginal tribe of the lower north shore

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*I acknowledge the Aboriginal people of the Lower North Shore as the custodians of country.
I also acknowledge their Elders - past, present and emerging.*

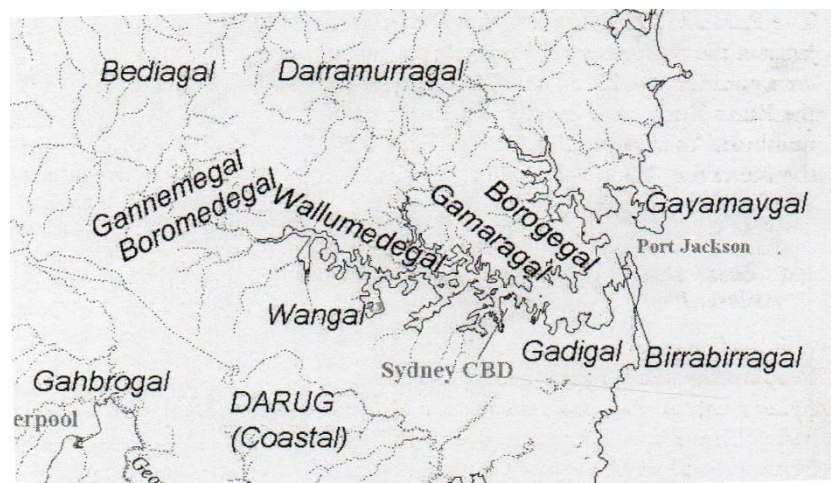


A group of Wallumedegal on the north shore of Port Jackson by the British convict Thomas Watling¹

The *Wallumedegal* Aboriginal people lived on the northern side of the Lane Cove River. However, a mere thirty years after colonisation by predominately Europeans the *Wallumedegal* had been dispossessed.

The following summary of the *Wallumedegal* draws heavily on the work of Dr Val Attenbrow, the north shore Aboriginal Heritage Office and personal observations and reports of various members of the First Fleet².

When the English arrived at *Warrane* (Port Jackson) in January 1788 there were three Aboriginal tribes inhabiting the lower north shore (as shown in the map below). In the vicinity of the Mosman district were the *Borogegal*. The largest group, the *Gayamaygal*, were along *Warrin ga* (Middle Harbour) and the country from *Kuba Kaba* (Middle Head) to the country of the *Darramurragal* clan to the north-west. The *Wallumedegal* inhabited the northern shore and along the *Turrumburra* (Lane Cove River).



¹ Thomas Watling was a painter, author and convict from Dumfries, Scotland, Watling was transported to Sydney in 1792. Most of Watling's work are of natural history subjects but there are also many sensitive portraits of Aboriginal figures and a few landscape views, which serve as invaluable records of early colonial life.

² Extensive excerpts of the writing of the earliest European observers are given by Currie (2008).

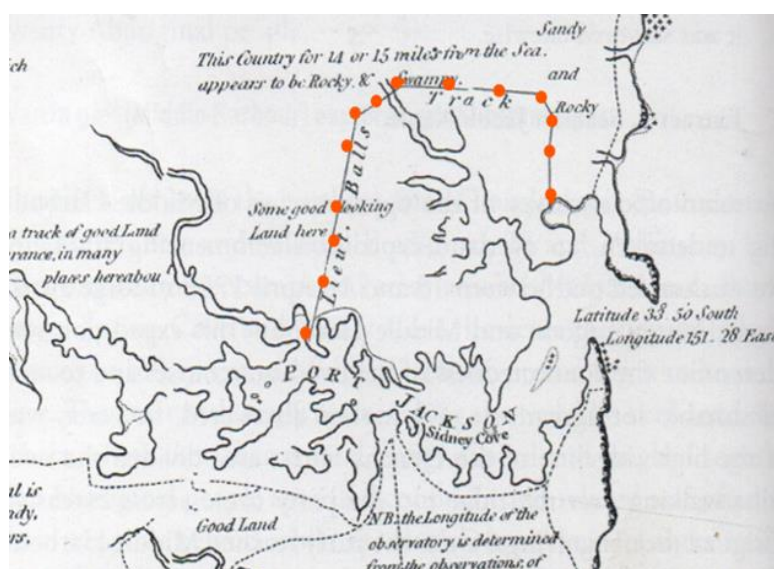
The *Wallumede* mob inhabited the country on the northern side opposite *Warrane* (Sydney Cove) ⁱⁱ. They were part of the Aboriginal Sydney Language Nation (some time mistakenly called *Eora* and later *Biyal-Biyal*). ⁱⁱⁱ

In February 1790, Governor Arthur Phillip wrote: "... the opposite Shore (northern shore of Sydney Harbour) is called *Wallumetta* ^{iv} & the Tribe *Wallumedegal*". Then in April 1790, Lt. King wrote "the tribe of *Wallumede* inhabit the North Shore opposite *Warrane*". In Phillip's 1793 book '*Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*', *Wallumedegal* appears as the sixth in the list of the names of the eighteen 'Tribes' around Sydney Cove". Historian George Thornton wrote that "*there was another tribe a little west of opposite Sydney Cove; those were called Walumetta*". ^v In First Fleet reports, the *Wallumedegal* were said to occupy the north shore of Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) immediately opposite Sydney Cove and west along the north shore of the Par-ra-mat-ta (Parramatta River). ^{vi}

Later historians mention that "the *Wallumedegai* lived in the North Shore area of Sydney. ^{vii} Willoughby Librarians noted that "the *Wallumedegal* clan may have also had a close association with the Willoughby area" and "today, few if any of the Aboriginal people living in the northern suburbs can trace their ancestry to the ... *Wallumedegal* clan." ^{viii} Warner ^{ix} also mentions that "opposite Sydney Cove, on the North Shore, lived the *Wallumedegal*". Currie commented that "the Lane Cove River was believed to be the home of the *Wallumedegal*". ^x

Within 30 years of predominately European settlement the *Warrumedegal* had effectively been dispossessed from the lower reaches of the *Turrumburra* (Lane Cove River) and Sydney Harbour. A French tourist to Australia (Capt. Louis de Freycinet) reported that by 1819: "the *Wallumedegal* did not occupy the north shore opposite Sydney Cove. ^{xi} Freycinet had been rowed along the *Par-amatta* (Parramatta) river from *Warrane* in 1819.

Governor Phillip was the first European to lead an expedition into the Lane Cove River Valley ^{xii}, some three months after the arrival of the First Fleet in the colony in January 1788. As shown below, Lieutenant Ball approached the river from the north.



Route taken by Ball in 1788

Lieutenant Ralph Clark, accompanied by three convicts, explored the Lane Cove River Valley in 1790. They rowed some 10 kilometres up the Lane Cove River and recorded that they saw Aboriginal people. Clark had been instructed by Phillip to establish relations with Aboriginals so that they "facilitate the extraction of natural resources – timber and lime shells for building and grasses for

fodder". Seafood was also in abundance along the river: notably oysters. Fresh water was also in abundance. There were also tall trees providing timber suitable for building. Blackbutt was used for planking and masts, blue gum for wheels, red mahogany for hardwood framing, blood gum for fencing, turpentine for wharves, red gum for ship building and oak for shingles and palings.^{xiii}

Many timber-getters were also attracted to the area and began illegal operations in the 1820s. The sawyers camped out, living on salt beef and damper, felled the forest giants and dug great saw pits. Lime burners were also attracted to the edges of the river, particularly using the readily available middle shells to burn down to make lime (used in buildings).

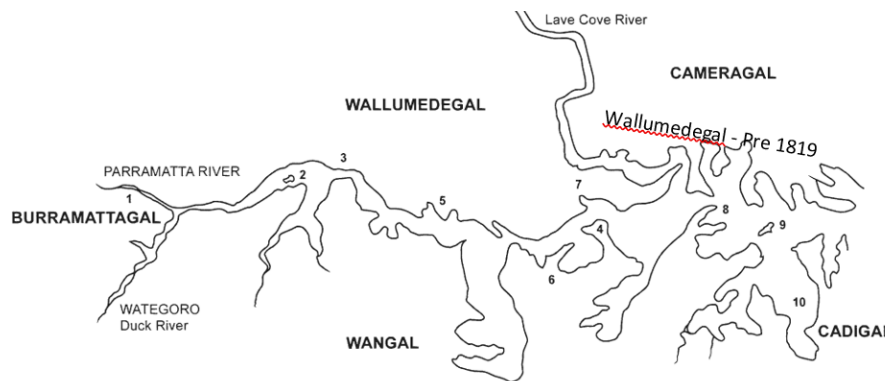
The intrusion of Europeans along the banks of the *Turrumburra* had an immediate and devastating impact on the *Warrumedegal* people. Faced with assault on their traditional way of life the *Wallumedegal* had three options: fight, die or flight. There is no evidence that the *Warrumedegal* mounted any form of formal resistance.

Whilst they did not die in battle, die they did, in their hundreds from various diseases to which they were exposed.

Smallpox is one of the most virulent and deadly diseases to have afflicted humanity. Throughout its long history, it infected hundreds of millions of people. Tens of millions of people died. Those who survived were often badly scarred, blinded or both. Aboriginal, post European settlement were beset with the disease. About three out of 10 people of some societies infected with the smallpox virus die. This was much higher for Australian Aboriginals who had been isolated for eons. In April 1789, 15 months after the First Fleet arrived, a major smallpox epidemic broke out. The outbreak did not affect the British colonists, most of whom had been exposed to the disease during their infancy. As a result, smallpox was not detected until Aboriginals living between Sydney Cove and the Heads were found, 'laying dead on the beaches and in the caverns of rocks'. Without previous exposure to the smallpox virus, Aboriginal peoples had no resistance, and up to 70 per cent were killed by the disease.

Those Aboriginals who survived the imported diseases may have taken to hiding in the caves along and at the end of the long bays along the river, keeping out of sight. This could explain why it was reported that the *Wallumedegal* had left the shores of the lower *Turrumburra*. Alternatively, they may have fled further up the river.

The *Wallumedegal* were known to have inhabited the area of current day Ryde, between the *Burramatta* (Parramatta River) and *Turrumburra* (Lane Cove River) (see map below).



Range of the Wallumedegal^{xiv}

From the earliest days the *Wallumedegal* were subject to the pressure of the arrival of a new nation that ultimately led to their dispossession. After tens of thousands of years of living along the

Turrumburra, the *Wallumedegal* found their way of life suddenly totally disrupted by the interlopers. After a short 30 years the *Wallumedegal* had been dispossessed of their country along the *Turrumburra* and lost from the memory of the Willoughby District.

Catherine Warne reported (based on observations by Captain Phillip) that

“The people of the lower North Shore were the Cammeraygal and the Wallumedegal, part of the larger Gu-ring-gai group...the opposite shore (of Sydney Harbour) is called Wallumetta, and the tribe Wallumedegal.”^{xv}

SIGNIFICANT RESEARCHERS

Val Attenbrow is an Archaeologist who has undertaken extensive research in the Sydney Basin on Aboriginal cultural heritage. Dr Attenbrow is a Senior Fellow in the Anthropology Unit, Research Branch of the Australian Museum, where she worked since 1989.

The **Aboriginal Heritage Office** is a joint initiative by Lane Cove, North Sydney, Willoughby, Ku-ring-gai, Strathfield and The Northern Beaches Council in a progressive move to protect Aboriginal heritage in these areas.

Personal observations and reports of interaction with Aboriginals by various members of the **First Fleet**. It is acknowledged that some interpretations and reports may not have correctly represented meaning.

Currie, J, 2008, Bo-ra-ne Ya-goo-na Par-ry-boo-go, Willoughby City Council and Aboriginal Heritage Office.

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- ⁱ Attenbrow, V, 2010, Sydney's Aboriginal Past, 2nd Edition, p.23
- ⁱⁱ Aboriginal Heritage Office (NSROC)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Aboriginal Heritage Office (NSROC)
- ^{iv} The more recent suggestion for the name of the country is Wallumede.
- ^v G.Thornton 1892:7
- ^{vi} Smith,K.V, 2005, Wallumedegal an aboriginal history of Ryde, City of Ryde
- ^{vii} Twigg, L, 2003, Chatswood Public School 1983 – 2003 p.8
- ^{viii} Aboriginal people – History of Willoughby – Fact Sheet no. 13, 2014, Willoughby City Library Services
- ^{ix} Warner G, 1988, Artarmon, Council of the Municipality of Willoughby
- ^x Currie, J. 2008, Bo-ra-ne Ya-goo-na Par-ry-boo-go, An Aboriginal History of Willoughby, Willoughby City Council p.33
- ^{xi} Smith,K.V, 2005, Wallumedegal an aboriginal history of Ryde, City of Ryde
- ^{xii} Arthur Phillip Chapter of Fellowship of First Fleeters 2022
- ^{xiii} Scott, B.A, 2017, The Business of the Lane Cover River
- ^{xiv} After Smith, K.V, 2005, Wallumedegal an aboriginal history of Ryde, City of Ryde
- ^{xv} Warne, C. 2005, Pictorial History of the Lower North Shore, Kingsclear Books