

11.0 Research Design

The Meaning of the Archaeological Evidence

The detailed interpretation of the archaeological evidence is found in the following chapters 12 to 16. This is where the research significance of the archaeology is explored and revealed, giving its meaning within a theoretical and social context. The main research questions that the archaeological evidence allows us to address are:¹

1. Pre-European environment (Chapter 12)

Evidence pertaining to the topography, geomorphology, vegetation etc. of this site prior to colonisation may contribute to research in the environmental history of the Sydney region, Aboriginal land management practices, historical ecology etc.

2. Remaking the landscape (Chapter 13)

The Conservatorium site is located within one of the most significant historic and symbolic landscapes created by European settlers in Australia. The area is located between the sites of the original and replacement Government Houses, on a prominent ridge. While the utility of this ridge was first exploited by a group of windmills, utilitarian purposes soon became secondary to the Macquaries' grandiose vision for Sydney and the Governor's Domain in particular. The later creations of the Botanic Gardens, The Garden Palace and the Conservatorium itself, re-used, re-interpreted and created new vistas, paths and plantings to reflect the growing urban and economic importance of Sydney within the context of the British empire.

Modifications to this site, its topography and vegetation, can therefore be interpreted within the theme of landscape as an expression of the ideology of colonialism. It is considered that this site is uniquely placed to address this research theme which would act as a meaningful interpretive framework for archaeological evidence relating to environmental and landscape features.

3. Food production in the early colony (Chapter 14)

Remains relating to the windmill and bakery may provide significant detail relating to many historical questions surrounding early attempts at food production in the colony. Such remains could also contribute to research into the foodways, diet and technological strategies of the first colonists.

4. The construction, modification and use of the Stables (Chapter 15, Volume 4)

Because of the cultural significance of the Stables building, archaeological evidence relating to its construction, modification and use over time will contribute valuable detail to historical research into the work of Greenway, technological and architectural strategies used in the early colony, details of the use and operations of the Stables, history of the Conservatorium etc.

5. Material culture of the Governors, their staff and servants (Chapter 16)

The material culture associated with the occupants of both the Stables and Government House should provide tangible evidence of hierarchical behaviour within a pre-eminent household in Australia. This evidence should assist in understanding the lifeways of these occupants which should shed light on how this hierarchy was maintained and mediated through material culture. The evidence for hierarchical behaviour should be understood in the context of the defining of Australia in the late nineteenth century as an 'egalitarian and prosperous' society.

¹ Questions 1 to 4 are from the research design in Ireland 1998b:35.

12.0 Pre-European Environment and the Aboriginal Landscape

12.1 Research Question

The question focuses on the nature of the:

...evidence pertaining to the topography, geomorphology, vegetation etc. of this site prior to colonization may contribute to research in the environmental history of the Sydney region, Aboriginal land management practices, historical ecology etc.²

It was considered ‘unlikely that in situ evidence of Aboriginal occupation will survive on this site’ and this was proven to be a correct assumption. Therefore there was no archaeological evidence associated with the Aboriginal occupation and use of the site to interpret. As part of Casey 2002 considerable research was undertaken on the Aboriginal use and contact in this area. The following sections are based on work in Chapter 4 and sections of Casey 2002.

12.2 Pre-European Environment³

The earliest pollen samples indicate the Conservatorium site near the apex of the ridge was located within eucalypt Low Open Forest.⁴ The forest understorey was dominated by shrubs rather than the grasses and ferns found in otherwise similar dry sclerophyll forests and woodlands on fertile/frequently burnt sites around Sydney Harbour, e.g. along the Lane Cove River.

Because it is uncertain whether the oldest soils preserved on the Conservatorium site predate European settlement or represent the earliest years of the colony, it is possible that the shrub understorey had developed within a more open sclerophyll vegetation type (Woodland), due to a change in fire regime *following* European settlement.

Nevertheless the pollen data confirm the general accuracy of many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century illustrations, which show the ridge behind First Government House, covered in a mosaic of forest/woodland, scrub and grassland. Use of Bennelong Point for grazing cattle in 1788 implies the lower slopes of the ridge were covered by grassland maintained by fires lit by Aborigines camped on the foreshore.

12.2.1 What was growing on the ridge between Sydney and Farm Coves in 1788?

Information on the vegetation growing at Sydney Cove before European settlement is important for two reasons.

Firstly it provides a base line against which the impact of Europeans can be measured in Australia’s longest settled district.⁵ This impact includes not only obvious changes such as the felling of any existing forests and woodland, but also of the rapidity with which exotic weeds such as dandelions invaded the landscape.

Secondly, it helps clarify the issue whether what we now regard as ‘pristine’ native vegetation is not in fact an artefact of altered fire regimes. For example early accounts indicate that the understorey in sclerophyll forest in the Lane Cove district was dominated by grasses and ferns, not

² Ireland 1998b:35.

³ The following sections are extracted from Dr Mike Macphail’s report which is produced in full in Chapter 22.2 of this report.

⁴ Specht 1970.

⁵ Fox 1990; Hobbs & Hopkins 1990.

by shrubs as at present.⁶ The evolution of these shrub communities almost certainly reflects the change from ‘cool’/frequent to ‘hot’/infrequent firing regimes after c. 1788.⁷ Physical clearing of trees and grazing has the opposite ecological effect, viz, promotes the spread of grasses at the expense of woody taxa.

A number of attempts have been made to reconstruct the vegetation growing around Sydney Cove before European settlement in 1788 using a combination of early colonial-period documents and illustrations and remnant vegetation surviving in equivalent sites elsewhere around Sydney Harbour, e.g. Campbell (1925) and Benson & Howell (1990).

Both types of evidence are equivocal. Reasons include ‘artistic license’ and the probability that the surviving (usually shrub-rich) bushland has developed *since* European settlement. Nevertheless illustrations of Sydney Cove drawn before 1791 concur in showing low open forest covering the ridge behind First Government House. Examples reproduced in McCormick (1987) are William Bradley and Capt. John Hunter (1788), George Raper (attributed) (1789), William Bradley (1791), Juan Ravenet (undated but before 1793) and Fernando Brambila (published 1793).

Support for their general accuracy is provided by subsequent (1792-1795) illustrations which show either an obviously stylised wooded backdrop or isolated trees (1792-94). Significantly, two undated/unsigned views from the same period show dead, moribund and lopped eucalypts.⁸ Views of, and from, the eastern side of Sydney Cove show scrub surrounding tree stumps on what is now the Inner Domain.⁹

Palynofloras recovered from the truncated soil profiles preserved below Verbrugghen Hall (#1006) confirm that the understorey in sclerophyll forest or woodland on the Conservatorium site was dominated by shrubs, not grasses. The significance of this observation however depends on whether the samples predate European settlement or represent the period between 1788 and c. 1800 when the site was first cleared. For example, traces of exotic and possible exotic pollen types could indicate that the truncated soils (Samples 50-52) developed after 1788 or that the profiles incorporate post-Settlement material (cf Samples 53-54).

If the former, then it is possible that woody understorey developed *after* 1788, i.e. that the ridge was covered in eucalypt forest or woodland with a grassy understorey in 1788. If the latter (the preferred option) then the ridge *apex* almost certainly was covered in eucalypt Low Open Forest rather than (more open) Woodland at the time of European Settlement (terminology after Specht, 1970). The rapidity with which ‘brush’ re-established itself on the Domain during the 1820s is evidence of the importance of frequent fires and/or grazing in maintaining grasslands in the Sydney district.¹⁰

Documentary evidence that the earliest recorded name for Bennelong Point was ‘Cattle Point’ implies that the lower slopes and foreshore were covered by grassland, not sclerophyll forest.¹¹ The logical explanation is that these grasslands were maintained by fires lit by Aborigines camping around the foreshore of Sydney and Farm Coves. It is equally reasonable to conclude that Aboriginal fires will have had a variable impact on the hinterland, leading to the ridge being covered by a mosaic of woody and herbaceous vegetation types at the time of first European Settlement.

⁶ Clark & McLoughlin 1986.

⁷ cf Jackson, 1968.

⁸ British Museum Watling Collection 19, L.S. 9, 13, reproduced as Plates 18, 25, 29 respectively in McCormick, 1987.

⁹ Plates 52, 53 in McCormick, 1987.

¹⁰ Gilbert, 1986, p. 42.

¹¹ DPWS, HS 1997:78.

12.2.2 Pollen evidence from original soil profiles – Group A

Pollen evidence came from 12 samples taken from a range of soils identified as part of the original soil profile. Generally the soil profile was truncated with only a shallow topsoil, when evident. The A2 horizon was more prevalent than the A1 horizon.

The relatively high pollen yields are unusual for sandy subsoil (soil A₂) horizons. One not unlikely explanation is that the microfossil content comes from old topsoil mixed into the sandy clay during the early phases of clearing of the site.

If correct, then the sediment post-dates European occupation of the peninsula but much of the microfossil content could represent the pre-clearance vegetation on the site. Even when buried under later rubbish there is no evidence for ‘leakage’ of younger pollen and spores into the natural topsoil (Sample 21).

The combined data represents *Eucalyptus* dry sclerophyll forest or woodland with a shrub-dominated understorey. The paucity of grasses is significant because of documentary and other evidence that at the time of European settlement, the understorey in many of the forests lining Sydney Harbour were grass- and fern-dominated due to frequent Aboriginal fires (see Discussion).¹²

Because of the exposed, rocky nature of the site, the casuarina count is more likely to represent shrubs species such as *Allocasuarina distyla*, rather than tree species such as *A. torulosa*. Casuarinas are amongst trees listed as growing in the grounds of First Government House in 1802.¹³

Other shrub genera in the general vicinity were wattles, broom-heath, banksia, grevillea (*Grevillea/Hakea*), ti-tree (*Leptospermum*) and crinkle-bush (*Lomatia*). Cheese-wood trees may have been planted locally or, less likely due to limited pollen dispersal, the pollen sourced from distant stands in the Tank Stream Valley.¹⁴

Sedge (Cyperaceae) pollen and selaginella (*Selaginella uliginosa*) and liverwort (*Cingulatisporites bifurcatus*) spores indicate that the soils were moist although there is no evidence that fern communities were widespread on the site. Exceptions are Samples 13 and 21, which preserve ‘high’ numbers of Rainbow-fern spores (*Calochlaena dubia*). Rainbow-fern typically grows on moist sandstone ‘outcrops’, an ecological preference that also includes damp sandstone/brick walls and foundations. Whether the fossil pollen data are evidence of early stone or brickwork constructions on the site is unknown.

12.3 Aboriginal Occupation of the Domain¹⁵

12.3.1 Aboriginal Land

The landing by the British on the southern shore of Port Jackson, at what came to be called Sydney Cove, was the first permanent incursion into Aboriginal land by non-Aboriginal people in the more than 40,000 years of Aboriginal habitation of the continent of Australia. Sydney Cove and the adjacent Domain lands traditionally belonged to the Cadigal, a clan of the Eora, a word meaning

¹² Clark & McLoughlin 1986.

¹³ cf Benson & Howell 1990:116; Gilbert 1986:16.

¹⁴ see Campbell 1925; Benson & Howell 1990.

¹⁵ Taken from Casey 2002:ch7.

“people”.¹⁶ Phillip’s recording of the boundaries of some of the Aboriginal territories of the Sydney region was published in letters to Lord Sydney:

The natives live in tribes, which are distinguished by the name of their chief...About the north-west part of this harbour there is a tribe which is mentioned as being very powerful, either from their number or the abilities of their chief. The district is called Cammerra; the head of the tribe is named Cammerragal...

From the entrance of the harbour, along the south shore, to the cove adjoining (Darling Harbour) this settlement the district is called Cadi, and the tribe Cadigal; the women, Cadigalleon.

*The south side of the harbour from the above-mentioned cove to Rose Hill, which the natives call Parramatta, the district is called Wann, and the tribe Wanngal.*¹⁷

According to Collins only three Cadigal survived the 1788-89 smallpox epidemic - Colbee, Nanbarry and another man. This led them to unite with another “tribe” for their own protection.¹⁸

Collins describes the groups as families rather than tribes and suggests larger kin groups were established through intermarriage. Observations by the various First Fleet diarists note that Cammeragal and inhabitants on the southern side visited each other often and all the initiated males from both sides of the harbour had the upper right incisor removed.¹⁹ The Aboriginal people’s name for Sydney Cove was Warrang, the eastern side of this cove was Tobegully and Farm Cove was Woccanmagully. There are various spellings of these names; those noted on Meehan’s 1807 map have been adopted for this chapter (**Figure 2.10**). Two Aboriginal men discussed below are Colbee and Bennelong. Colbee was a chief or headman of the Cadigal.²⁰ There are various references to Bennelong as a Wangal but the source for this is not stated.²¹

12.3.2 Bennelong’s Hut and Aboriginal People at Government House

The Aboriginal name for the eastern peninsula of Sydney Cove was Tobegully.²² It eventually became Bennelong’s Point, after Bennelong, an Aboriginal male captured and then befriended by Governor Phillip, and derived from his occupation of a hut on this point. The name Bennelong’s Point, which is current today, was in common use by August 1795.²³ A previous vernacular European name was Cattle Point after the landing of the cattle from the First Fleet.²⁴

On 25 November 1789 Bennelong and Colbee were kidnapped to initiate interaction between the British and indigenous inhabitants. Colbee soon escaped but Bennelong was kept for some more months, until May 1790.²⁵ During this period he slept upstairs in a room at First Government House which he shared with a Frenchman, Bernard de Maliez, the governor’s steward.²⁶ This was the second attempt at kidnapping Aboriginal males; the first Arabanoo eventually died of smallpox.²⁷ The intention behind the kidnappings was to implement the orders in Phillip’s

¹⁶ Smith 2001:74

¹⁷ Phillip to Sydney, 13 February 1790, HRA 1:160.

¹⁸ Collins 1798:497; Smith 2001

¹⁹ Collins 1798:453.

²⁰ King in Hunter 1793:168.

²¹ Smith 2001:vii; Turbet 1989:22.

²² McBryde 1989:17.

²³ Collins 1798:355.

²⁴ Collins 1798:5, Feb. 1788; Scott 1963:58.

²⁵ Collins 1798:71, 92; Tench 1979:159, 166.

²⁶ Smith 2001:39-40, 51.

²⁷ Collins 1798:54.

commission, 'You are to endeavour by every means to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them'.²⁸

The capture of Bennelong and Colbee was intended to establish a better relationship between the new arrivals and the original inhabitants, to facilitate their incursions into the hinterland and to maintain the settlement free of the irritating robberies and spearings.²⁹ In addition convicts caused problems for Aboriginal people by stealing their canoes and weapons from unattended huts. Phillip sought to change this and implement his orders by learning their language and customs. Bennelong eventually escaped and for some time avoided Sydney Cove. It was not until after Phillip was speared at Manly that there were friendlier relations with Bennelong and other Aboriginal people.³⁰

Following this rapprochement Bennelong asked Governor Phillip, in September 1790, for a hut to be built, 'at the extremity of the eastern point of the cove'. Bennelong specifically identified this location.³¹ The governor agreed because he was, 'desirous of preserving the friendly intercourse which seemed to have taken place'.³² By mid November 1790 a brick hut was built. It was 12 feet square (4 metres square) with clay roofing tiles.³³ The hut was not just for Bennelong but for many of the Aboriginal people who gathered at this place, once friendlier relations were established with Governor Phillip and the settlers. According to Tench, 'one day, the natives were observed to assemble in more than an ordinary number, at their house on the point'.³⁴ On the same visit King mentions how, 'they found five men, two youths, several women and children: some of these people were on the grass before the door of the hut'.³⁵ Lieutenant Phillip Gidley King (published in Hunter 1793) provides detailed descriptions of the Aborigines and how groups stayed at Bennelong's hut.³⁶ David Blackburn observed, 'A House of Bricks was Run up for a Chief calld Bennelong...where his Wife Children and Relations often Come & stay a Day or two - Since When, Many More Men Women & Children are Come Among Us, & are Sometimes quite familiar'.³⁷

After his initial capture Bennelong frequented Government House.³⁸ On one occasion he and his wife found the hut too crowded to sleep there and spent the night at Government House instead.³⁹ It is possible they were also seeking the governor's protection by staying in the house. Aboriginal people eating, sleeping or staying at Government House was not unusual as friendlier relations developed. They often slept in a shed in the yard or in the back rooms of the house.⁴⁰ Some saw the governor's house as a place where they would be safe from attack by other Aboriginal people.⁴¹ On occasions the paling fence around Government House was a guarded boundary to control disputes between Aboriginal groups, especially to protect those who sought respite at Government House.⁴² By December 1790 Colbee and Bennelong stayed in Sydney three or four days a week.⁴³ Bennelong reported to Phillip that he attended a dance at Botany Bay where a song was sung about

²⁸ George III, 25 April 1787, HRA 1:13.

²⁹ Collins 1798:24; Tench 1979:138.

³⁰ Smith 2001:51-59.

³¹ Tench 1979:200.

³² Collins 1798:113; Tench 1979:200.

³³ Collins 1798:117; Tench 1979:200.

³⁴ Tench 1979:200.

³⁵ Hunter 1793:481.

³⁶ Hunter 1793:488, 527.

³⁷ David Blackburn, 17 March 1791, quoted in Smith 2001:68.

³⁸ Tench 1979:189.

³⁹ November 1790, Hunter 1793:487.

⁴⁰ King in Hunter 1793:480, 488, 497, 499, 527, 528; McBryde 1989:39; Tench 1979:202.

⁴¹ Hunter 1793:488

⁴² Hunter 1793:527-528; Tench 1979:202.

⁴³ Hunter 1793:492.

his 'house, the governor, and the white men at Sydney'.⁴⁴ Following a dispute between the governor and Bennelong, the fence, yard area and house were demarcated as points into which Bennelong was variously permitted to enter. On one occasion he was stopped at the gate by the governor and not allowed to enter Government House grounds. On the next day he was allowed into the yard, like other Aborigines, and fed but he was not permitted to enter Government House.⁴⁵ King interpreted this as 'putting him on a level with the other natives, and he appeared to feel his degradation; but it did not prevent him from repeating his visits frequently'.⁴⁶ Eventually Phillip and Bennelong reconciled and Bennelong was permitted to enter Government House once more. After this 'the number of visitors greatly increased, the governor's yard being their head quarters'.⁴⁷ By May 1792 there were 'three or four of the chiefs who attend the governor's house every day for their dinner and a glass of wine'.⁴⁸

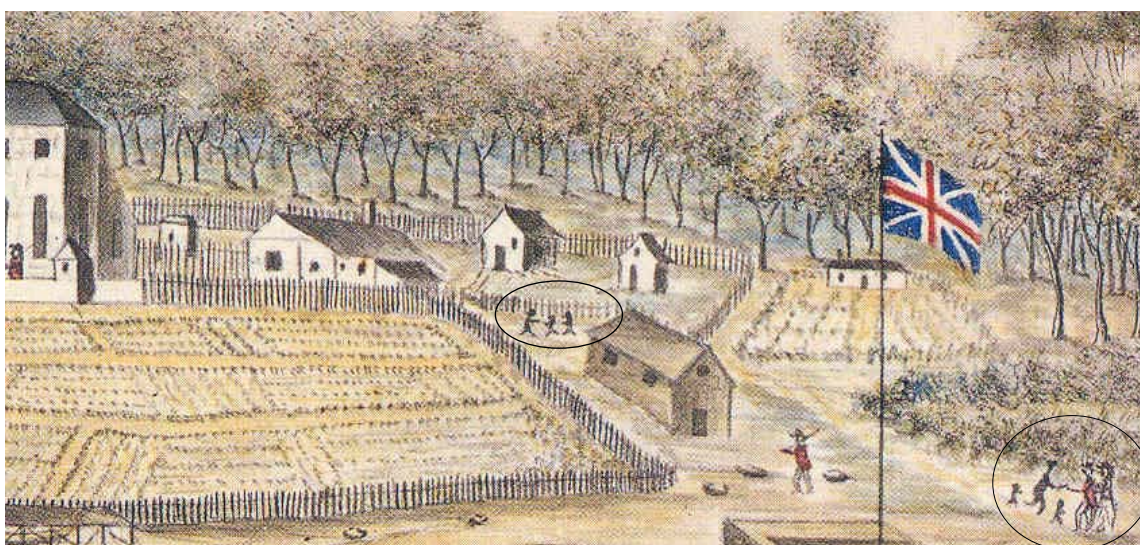


Figure 12.1: Detail from 'Governor's House at Sydney, Port Jackson', 1791, William Bradley, watercolour. McCormick 1987:pl.10, ML Safe 1/14. This view shows two groups of Aboriginal people near Government House. The lower group are an adult with two children greeting to uniformed men. The red-coated sentinal is pacing back-and-forth guarding Government House. The details from this and the paintings below are rare depictions of Aboriginal people interacting with soldiers around the grounds of Government House, nor are they in a traditional pose chosen by most painters, such as sitting around a campfire, or in a canoe.

Aside from sleeping and eating at Government House Bennelong sought in August 1791 to have his child born there but Phillip persuaded him that Barangaroo should have the baby at the hospital.⁴⁹ In the end she had Dilbong in a traditional birth out in the open.⁵⁰ The intention to have his child born at Government House has been interpreted as Bennelong seeking to make familial links to Phillip and perhaps *de facto* claiming of Cadigal land.⁵¹ Altogether three Aboriginal bodies were known to be buried at Government House, - Balloderry, Arabanoo, and Dilbong, the daughter of

⁴⁴ Phillip in Hunter 1793:493.

⁴⁵ Hunter 1793:508-509.

⁴⁶ King in Hunter 1793:509.

⁴⁷ King in Hunter 1793:511.

⁴⁸ Thompson HRA 2:797.

⁴⁹ King in Hunter 1793:544-545.

⁵⁰ Collins 1798:465.

⁵¹ Smith 2001:134.

Barangaroo and Bennelong's daughter.⁵² When Dilbong was buried in the Government House garden Bennelong and two or three other Aboriginal people passed a nearby vigil.⁵³

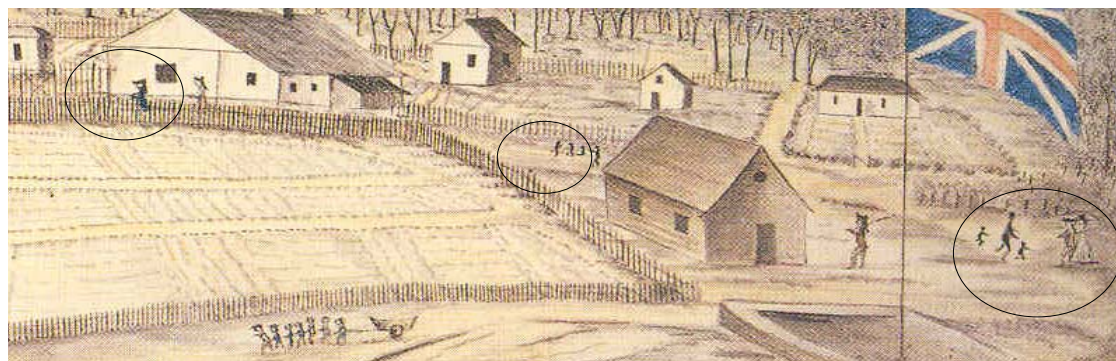


Figure 12.2: Detail from 'View of the Governor's House at Sydney, in Port Jackson, New South Wales Jany 1791', William Bradley, watercolour. McCormick 1987:pl.11, NLA. This detail is very similar to the above picture and repeats the two groups of Aboriginal people as shown above but also has Governor Phillip in his naval blue coat and captain's hat walking towards Government House. As with the above image the guard is pacing back-and-forth.

Relationships also developed with other members of the settlement and the local Aboriginal people, where they would be fed and looked after if they came to visit the settlement.⁵⁴ Hunter noted, 'before I left Port Jackson, the natives become very familiar and intimate with every person in the settlement; many of them took up their rest every night in some of the gentlemen's houses' (*Figures 12.1, 12.2*).⁵⁵ Tench, with some irony, observed, 'with the natives we are hand in glove. They throng the camp every day, and sometimes by their clamour and importunity for bread and meat (of which they all now eat greedily) are become very troublesome'.⁵⁶ Some people complained they could 'scarcely keep them out of their houses in daytime'.⁵⁷ This suggests Phillip's ordering of the kidnapping of Colbee and Bennelong in association with their time spent with Phillip achieved an "accommodation" with the Aboriginal inhabitants around Sydney Cove.

Aboriginal people performed dances in the area of Bennelong's hut⁵⁸ as well as further to the east in Farm Cove which had a Bora ground associated with an important male initiation ceremony. Collins recorded two major corroborees at Farm Cove in 1791 and 1795.⁵⁹ Both appear to have been held at the same time of the year, early February. For days the ground at the head of Farm Cove was prepared 'by clearing it of grass, stumps, etc. it was of an oval figure, the dimensions of it 27 feet by 18 and was named Yoo-lahng'.⁶⁰ The ceremony to be performed was part of the major male initiation rite where the upper right incisor was removed. During the various dances and ceremonies, which took place over a few days, the initiated males were given power over the dog, ability to kill kangaroos, and become brave and good fighters.⁶¹

⁵² Atkinson 1997:157.

⁵³ Collins 1798:502.

⁵⁴ October 1790, King in Hunter 1793:476; Hunter 1793:210.

⁵⁵ Hunter 1793:210.

⁵⁶ November 1790, Tench 1979:192.

⁵⁷ Thompson, May 1792, HRA 2:797.

⁵⁸ Hunter 1793:210.

⁵⁹ Collins 1798:466-467.

⁶⁰ Collins 1798:467.

⁶¹ Collins 1798:469, 471, 477.

Bennelong's hut was demolished five years after it was built, in November 1795, having fallen into disrepair, mainly because of Bennelong's absence in England. Bennelong's hut was used by the Malaspina expedition in 1793 as a store for their astronomical instruments. They established an observatory on the ridgeline leading down to Bennelong's Point.⁶²

12.3.3 Comments

The building of a hut for Bennelong and other Aboriginal people provided them with a place where they could come and go and where they could live and practice their customs as they chose. The choice of Bennelong's Point is telling because Aboriginal people could arrive or leave there by water or by land and avoid most of the settlement which was some distance to the south and west. The site provided for easy access to fishing and other food sources, such as shellfish. It also allowed the original inhabitants to visit Government House at ease. From this place a level of interaction developed between Aboriginal people and the new residents of Sydney where many spent the night in people's houses.⁶³ They were also safe to engage in traditional Aboriginal practices. 'At times in the principal Streets of the Colony itself they have danced and sung almost the whole night around a campfire, without anyone molesting them'.⁶⁴ McBryde sees this approach as one of the two options Aboriginal people had, accommodation or resistance. Accommodation equated with 'attachment to the new power...with hopes of manipulating it for inter- or intra-group social, economic and political advantage'.⁶⁵ Bennelong was perhaps the earliest representative of this approach but only after his capture and often in times of food scarcity.

I would contend that as Phillip was preparing to leave with Bennelong and Yemmurrawannie in December 1792 he was concerned about maintaining places at Sydney to which the Aborigines enjoyed access. The Domain boundary included Bennelong's Point where Aborigines gathered at Bennelong's hut and Farm Cove, a major male initiation site. Phillip was a compassionate man who had established good relations with the Aborigines and it is likely that he sought to maintain within this place, localities that they visited and an important ceremonial site. I do not suggest that these were the only reasons but I would propose that they played a role in why he defined a boundary at this time and not before. By 1792 he understood Government House would remain for some considerable time and sought to establish boundaries within which other people could not build. Government House and its grounds had become a refuge for Aboriginal people from their internal disputes as well as a place where other Aboriginal people gathered, to camp and for ceremonies. It was a place of irreversible encounter with Aboriginal people, the point from which the distribution of food, fish, bread and meat changed their world forever.

12.4 Aboriginal People and the Government Domain – after Phillip to Hunter

Bennelong returned from England to Sydney with Governor Hunter and spent some time staying at Government House. At first Bennelong retained his acquired manners, requiring his Aboriginal friends, when visiting him at Government House, to be 'more cleanly in their persons, and less coarse in their manners'. Initially the British thought he would remain living within European confines of behaviour and dress but they were mistaken and within a few days Bennelong was absent from Government House fighting over his wife with her new husband. He continued to absent himself from Government House, leaving his clothes behind each time and resuming them on his return.⁶⁶ By November 1796 Bennelong had returned to a more traditional lifestyle but still claimed the governor's protection 'from the menaces of several of his countrymen'. The governor

⁶² Collins 1798:231, 577 n30.

⁶³ Hunter 1793:210.

⁶⁴ Malaspina, quoted in McBryde 1989:43.

⁶⁵ McBryde 1989:37.

⁶⁶ Collins 1798:367-368, 390.

sent soldiers along with Bennelong to tell the Aboriginal people threatening him that he was a friend of the governor and would be protected.⁶⁷

A male initiation ceremony took place at Farm Cove in 1795 and others celebrations took place between the town and the brickfields.⁶⁸ There were many fewer observations about contact with Aboriginal people in Sydney. This may be because it continued as previously or because there was less contact and there were many more concerns about the Aboriginal people in outlying areas where deaths on both sides were not unusual.⁶⁹ Judge-Advocate David Collins comments:

The native had lately become troublesome, particularly in lurking between the different settlements, and forcibly taking provisions and clothing from the convicts who were passing from one to another. One or two convicts having been wounded by them, some small armed parties were sent out to drive them away, and throw a few shot among them, but with positive orders to be careful not to take a life.

Several of these people, however, continued to reside in the town, and to mix with the inhabitants in the most unreserved manner. It was no uncommon circumstance to see them coming into town with bundles of fire-wood which they had been hired to procure, or bringing water from the tanks; for which services they thought themselves well rewarded with any worn-out jacket or trousers, or blankets, or a piece of bread. Of this latter article they were all exceedingly fond, and their constant prayer was for bread, importuning with as much earnestness and perseverance as if begging for bread had been their profession from infancy; and their attachment to us must be considered as an indication of their not receiving any ill treatment from us.⁷⁰

This suggests that some of the Aboriginal people who had known the settlers for a few years continued to maintain their relationships, one of performing menial tasks for small returns as well as begging for food, especially bread. There is no indication that Grose or Paterson continued the practices of Phillip in maintaining a relationship with the ‘chief’ of the local Aboriginal groups. Outside of Sydney there were clearly issues over land and goods, at various times growing into outright conflict. There was certainly a perspective which considered the behaviour of the Sydney Aboriginal groups different to those near Parramatta and beyond.⁷¹

12.5 Discussion

The Aboriginal occupation of the Government Domain on Sydney Cove and Farm Cove involved important and life defining ceremonies for male members of the Cadigal, Eora peoples. Although there was no direct evidence for the Aboriginal use of the site found during archaeological works at the Conservatorium site the Stable’s grounds were part of a much larger area. Its importance in the landscape can only be understood within this greater social, cultural and landscape context. Another important aspect of this landscape was its centrality to early encounters between Aboriginal and British culture. First Government House was an important ‘place’ in the changing relationships between these two cultures.

Many of the central events of the first five years of white settlement of Australia happened within or near Phillip’s Government Domain – landing at Sydney Cove, the clearing of ground, the commencement of farming, the building of the first house, the capture, imprisonment and coming in of Aboriginal people, the celebration of Aboriginal rituals and the erection of the first “house”

⁶⁷ Collins 1802:5, 96.

⁶⁸ Collins 1798:275, 466-467.

⁶⁹ GGO, HRNSW 3:26.

⁷⁰ Collins 1798:249, June 1793.

⁷¹ Collins 1798:25.

for an Aboriginal person. These were the most profound actions of settlement or invasion undertaken by the British in Australia. This was the end of a traditional lifestyle as Aboriginal people knew it in this part of the eastern coast and within a few years some Aboriginal people at Sydney Cove became dependent on the scarce food provided by the settlers. These were the acts of occupation at the edge of empire and on the success or failure of Phillip's first five years stood the whole history of modern white Australia and the British plan for a penal colony. A pattern of involvement and significance was established for the Domain in those first five years, for its place in the "progress of empire" did not diminish for many years.