

*John's second last paragraph on page three is new. Extracts from
of evidence will follow later.*

Did the Aborigines of the Manly, Warringah and Pittwater Peninsula Really Belong To The Kuring-gai Tribe?

By George Champion OAM and Shelagh Champion OAM September 2003

Having spent many years researching and publishing books and monographs on historical topics we realise that history never remains static. We meekly accepted that the term "Kuring-gai tribe" was authentic, without carrying out our own detailed research. Having now examined much evidence regarding the origin and use of this tribal name, we regret our complacency.

The term "Kuring-gai" was not mentioned in any of the First Fleet records nor in any of the Aboriginal vocabularies of the first fleeters such as Dawes, Phillip, Collins, Hunter or King etc. Even the present popular word "koori" was not used in the Sydney region. Others, such as surveyor James Larmer in the 1830s and Surveyor-General Mitchell in the 1840s, created lists of Aboriginal words and their meanings but there was still no mention of the word "Kuring-gai". Larmer in his 1853 list did mention the word "Coorey" meaning "blackfellow", but this was in reference to the Brisbane Waters and Tuggerah Lakes area.

The Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld arrived in Australia in 1824 and in 1825 established an Aboriginal Mission at Reid's Mistake (Belmont, Lake Macquarie) on 10,000 acres granted for that purpose by Governor Brisbane. Thelkeld spent many years carrying out detailed research directly with Aborigines in the 1820s and 1830s. He created a list titled *Specimens of the Language of the Aborigines of New South Wales to the Northward of Sydney* and headed it "Karree". Within this list of specimens the word "kooree" appears meaning blackfellow.

John Fraser, B.A. of Sauchie House West Maitland, where he was apparently a headmaster, wrote an article titled "The Aborigines of New South Wales", which was published in 1882 in the *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*. Through Mr J.W. Boydell of Camyrallyn, Gresford, Fraser became aware of a tribe or clan referred to as **"Gringai", which inhabited an area in the vicinity of Dungog**. Boydell claimed to have had an intimate acquaintance with the "Gringai" for more than thirty years.

By 1892 John Fraser was a BA, LL.D. and a Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW. He changed "Gringai" to "Kuring-gai", explaining that he had done so after ten years' thought and inquiry. In the same year he produced his own coloured map which showed the boundaries of the N.S.W. tribes, ascribing his term "Kuring-gai" [meaning I am kuri or man] to a huge area stretching from Port Macquarie in the north to Bulli in the south and westwards to the Blue Mountains.

Both R. H. Mathews (anthropologist/surveyor) and A.W. Howitt (anthropologist/magistrate) carried out much detailed research into the Aboriginal tribes, clans and languages of northern N.S.W. and published their findings. In 1904 Howitt drew up a map for his book *The Native Tribes of South-east Australia* but he did not ascribe the name of any tribe for our peninsula, and left it blank.

It appears that it wasn't until 1894 that the name "Kuring-gai" was first used officially on our peninsula. The N.S.W. Minister for Lands, Henry Copeland was looking for a suitable name for our new national park, when he found the name "Kuring-gai" on Fraser's map. Copeland thought the name had a genuine Aboriginal ring about it, and added the word "Chase" rather than "Park".

Fred McCarthy then Curator of Anthropology at the Australian Museum, in a personal communication, wrote in April 1961 that no name had ever been recorded for the whole tribe of our peninsula.

Norman Tindale, Curator of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum, in his *Aboriginal tribes of Australia* in 1974 claimed that a low level of understanding was attained by Fraser. Tindale was referring to Fraser's map, and felt that the term "Kuring-gai" had been applied in

an arbitrary fashion by Fraser. **Tindale said that an examination of Fraser's map showed that the tribes on it bore little relationship to those now recognised and were closer to the so-called nations that some nineteenth century writers pretended to find.** Tindale believed five or possibly six or more of the tribal names on Fraser's map were artifacts coined by Fraser to supply what he considered to be a lack.

For some time in the 1970s it became fashionable for the National Parks and Wildlife Service and others to use the term "Eora" as the tribal name for our peninsula, as there was obviously some doubt about the correctness of the word "Kuring-gai". In 1940 Tindale drew up a map and used the horde name Kameraigal as a tribal name as well as including Daruk for a portion of our peninsula to the north. However on his 1974 map he put "Eora" for the whole of our peninsula. He refrained from using "Kuring-gai".

The writings of Rev Arthur Capell 1970, and Dr Jim Kohen of Macquarie University 1987, still support the retention of the tribal name "Kuring-gai" for our peninsula. Capell in his article "Aboriginal Languages in the South Central Coast N.S.W: Fresh Discoveries", however **admits that he used the term "Kuring-gai" as a matter of convenience.**

Peter Turbet (a high school history teacher) in his book *The Aborigines of the Sydney District Before 1788* first published 1989, second edition 2001, says, "Much of the information on the languages of the Sydney region was gathered by R.H. Mathews towards the end of last century. According to Mathews, the Dharug language was spoken between the Hawkesbury River and Port Hacking and westward to where Windsor, Penrith and Campbelltown now stand. Dharawal was spoken from the south side of Port Hacking to Jervis Bay.

"Dr A. Capell has modified Mathews' findings by stating that a language which he calls Kuringgai was spoken from the north side of Port Jackson to Tuggerah Lakes and that a dialect of Dharawal was spoken by the Gweagal people on the Cronulla-Sutherland peninsula. Hence, Dharug, in a dialectical form, only reached the coast between Port Jackson and Botany Bay. **However, although it is clear from Capell's work that Kuringgai was spoken on the south side of Broken Bay, the evidence that it extended down to Port Jackson is inconclusive and, in fact, there are several arguments to the contrary.** Capell is saying that different languages were spoken on the north and south side of Sydney Harbour, yet the First Fleet observers, who easily detected language differences between the Buruberongals and coastal people, make no mention of any variations around Port Jackson. The Gamaraigals, Wangals and Cadigals were fishing people who often travelled by canoe, so Port Jackson was not the barrier to communication that it might seem. There was a considerable amount of travel across the Harbour, for example, Gamaraigal koradjis frequently paddled over to treat the sick or direct ceremonies. The claim that different languages were spoken on either side of the Harbour seems inconsistent with the frequency of contact between these areas.

"We have to be careful when trying to locate geographical boundaries between language areas. Sharp divisions between languages did not exist and, as we move across the country, a gradual merging of one language into another seems to be a more realistic picture."

Jim Kohen combined the word lists of John F. Mann (surveyor/explorer) and Lancelot Threlkeld without distinguishing from which list they were taken, and called it the "Dictionary of the Kuringgai Language". A map of "Locations of Aboriginal groups in the Sydney area" by J. Goodrum included in an article titled "Hunters and Fishers in the Sydney Region" by Kohen and Lampert contains some very serious errors, which could be misleading for Aboriginal Australians, as they frequently use the map as a reference. [Some obvious errors found, there may well be others:- Botany Bay is in the wrong location, Kayimai (should be at Manly), Borogegal (should be at Bradley's Head) and Cannalgal (should be near Manly on the harbour side not the ocean beach side. There is no evidence as yet that this horde extended to Dee Why).]

Anne Ross (formerly of National Parks and Wildlife Service) in an article in *Hawkesbury River History* 1990 stated that "Guringai" and "Eora" were alternatives.

River History 1990 stated that "Guringai" and "Eora" were alternatives.

However the word "Eora" was never a tribal name and it merely referred to the people of Port Jackson.

Recently the debate about the validity of the name "Kuring-gai" as a tribal name for Aborigines on our peninsula has again been raised by both Jakelin Troy (linguist) in *The Sydney Language* 1993, and Val Attenbrow (Senior Research Scientist the Australian Museum) in *Sydney's Aboriginal Past* 2002.

Attenbrow says, "The status of Guringai (Karee) as a separate language needs clarification. Even if it were spoken around Broken Bay, there seems to be no support in the early colonial records for it being spoken, or for the existence of a separate language or dialect, on the north shore of Port Jackson."

The dislocation of small pox which occurred in 1789 made it very difficult to compile accurate Aboriginal word lists etc which took such dramatic social changes into account. Any lists put together could not possibly reflect the true linguistic pattern of pre-contact with Europeans around the Sydney region.

In 1985, James Miller, a member of the Gringai horde in the Gresford area, made it clear in his book, *Koori: a will to win*, that his horde was part of the Wonnarua tribe in the Hunter River valley. He made no mention of the Gringai horde having any relationship whatsoever with a tribe named Kuring-gai. His book provides primary evidence from a Gringai Aboriginal of the Wonnarua tribe.

Are we misleading local Australian Aborigines by persisting with the name "Kuring-gai" when there is insufficient evidence available to support a name which was coined by a white person, namely John Fraser?

Mystery name

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RECENTLY it has become common to refer to the Aboriginal inhabitants of the peninsula as being of the Kuring-gai (or **Guringai**) tribe or language group.

It has also been commonly accepted that the word Kuring-gai is based on the word koori, meaning an Aboriginal person.

Even Aborigines have accepted Kuring-gai as the correct **name** for the tribe or language group that inhabited the peninsula.

But a search of historical records by local historians George and Shelagh Champion and others reveals the word Kuring-gai was coined by a European in 1882 and that there is no evidence the local Aborigines ever used the word as a tribal identity or had ever heard of the word.

When the officers of the First Fleet began investigating the land and the people living around Sydney Cove in 1788, they frequently noted the meanings of the Aboriginal words they encountered.

But not one of them ever mentioned the words Kuring-gai or koori.

In 1825 the Rev Lancelot Threlkeld established an Aboriginal mission on the shore of Lake Macquarie.

During the 1820s and 1830s, Threlkeld researched and published a book on the language of the Awabakal Aborigines who lived around Lake Macquarie and produced a list of Aboriginal words and **names**.

Threlkeld included the word kooree, meaning blackfellow, but he made no reference to a Kuring-gai tribe.

In 1853 surveyor James Larmer used the word coorey, meaning Aborigine, in reference to the Aborigines who were living on the Central Coast.

In 1882 a schoolmaster at West Maitland, John Fraser, wrote an article The Aborigines of NSW in which he referred to a group of Aborigines living near Dungog as Gringai. Ten years later Fraser altered the **name** Gringai to Kuring-gai and produced a map indicated that the Kuring-gai occupied all the lands between the Blue Mountains and the sea, from Bulli in the south to Port Macquarie in the north.

It was not until 1894 that Kuring-gai was used in an official way when Lands Minister Henry Copeland was looking for a **name** for the new national park on the southern side of Broken Bay.

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, surveyor R.H. Matthews and magistrate A.W. Howitt, both amateur anthropologists, carried out detailed research into the Aboriginal clans, tribes and languages on the NSW coast. But in the book Howitt produced in 1904 he did not ascribe a **name** for any tribe or language on Sydney's northern beaches.

In 1961 Australian Museum curator of anthropology Fred McCarthy wrote that no **name** had ever been recorded for the whole tribe living on Sydney's northern beaches.

In 1974 South Australian Museum curator of anthropology Norman Tindale claimed John Fraser, who first used the word Kuring-gai, had applied "a low level of understanding" to the matter and said the word had been used in an arbitrary fashion. He also said Fraser's map of the tribes of the NSW coast bore little resemblance to the tribal **names** now known.

The use of the word Kuring-gai as an Aboriginal tribal **name** has grown in popularity in recent decades.

The Rev Arthur Capell in 1970 said he used the word Kuring-gai "as a matter of convenience".

The word Kuring-gai, coined in 1892 by a white man from West Maitland, has no connection with Sydney or the northern beaches.

There is also no evidence to support the belief that Aborigines north of the harbour spoke a different language from those on the south side.

Unfortunately it will never be possible to compile a list of Aboriginal words or **names** for the Sydney region, due to the collapse of Aboriginal society around Sydney after the outbreak of smallpox in 1789. Sadly, it will take years to undo the damage done by the early writers who created the word Kuring-gai. *