

Placenames Australia

Newsletter of the Australian National Placenames Survey

an initiative of the Australian Academy of Humanities, supported by the Geographical Names Board of NSW



The five questions of Montville - from Connecticut to Queensland



Montville, Queensland

Ideally, when researching the origin of a placename we like to answer five *wh-* questions: *Who* named the place? *Why* was it so named? *What* does the name mean? *Where* does it come from (i.e. what language / region)? and *When* was the name bestowed? More often than not, we can't find answers to all five of these questions; sometimes answers to any of them are elusive. It is not very often we can obtain information that will answer all five questions. The following is a case where we can.

Several months ago I had the pleasure of presenting a talk about the work of ANPS to the Abbotsleigh Girls High School Adult Discussion Group (Wahroonga, Sydney). In the audience was Nona Robertson, who told me she could answer all five of the *wh-* questions for Montville, a small town in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, close to

Nambour, Queensland. I subsequently also discovered that the history of the naming of the town is well-known and documented (see references below).

However, Nona has a personal connection with the namers of the town, and was able to supply primary evidence of its naming. In 1869, after being widowed at the age of 50, Nona's great-grandmother, Hannah Smith (née Freeman; b. May 1816, Birtsmorton, Worcestershire, England; d. 17 April 1901, Montville, Queensland), moved from England to the USA with her family of 16 children. They settled in the town of Montville, Connecticut. However, in 1878 Hannah

and some of her sons decided to move to Queensland, arriving there in March 1879. They settled at Redland Bay, but moved again in 1893 to the Blackall Ranges where Hannah's sons Henry and Fred bought a selection of land. The local township was called *Razorback*, after the steep ridge on which it stands. In about 1893, Henry applied to establish a 'Receiving Office' (i.e. a Post Office) there. In 1897, he applied to the Under Secretary of the Queensland Post and Telegraph Department to have the name *Razorback* changed to *Vermont*. This was rejected, but apparently, at the request of his mother, he then re-applied, this time requesting the name be changed to *Montville*, after their hometown in Connecticut. As the document below shows, this request was officially accepted on 27 November 1897.

Nona supplied us with a copy of the document from the

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From the Editor



We're back from the excitement of *Placenames Australia's* AGM in Brisbane, and the associated ANPS Workshop. We also participated in the Annual Forum of CGNA, and you'll find a brief report on that, below.

At our AGM we welcomed the election to the Committee of Mary Feely and Brian Lehner as HonSec and HonTreas respectively. Jan Tent in particular was delighted, since he'll no longer have to do triple-duty for placenames and can concentrate on being Director of ANPS. Two of the papers at the Workshop will appear, I hope, in our next issue: Dale Lehner recounted her experiences as

a placename researcher, and we'll print her story of the Queensland toponym *Wilkie Creek*. I confessed to being fooled by the origin of *Watanobbi* in NSW, and (space permitting) I'll reveal all in March.

Dale's report on placenames associated with Frederick Roche appears on page 5; and you'll have already noticed Jan Tent's other Queensland excursion to Montville on our front page. Two new contributors share star billing this time. Denis Gojak reports on an early attempt to find Spanish influence in NSW. And John Murphy revisits the question of *Khanco-ban*; we suspect that some of our experts in Aboriginal languages will be unable to resist responding to his suggestions!

David Blair

Letter to the editor

Ron Woods from Alfredton, Vic., has responded to Paul Blair's letter in our September issue on the problems of recording places. Ron says:

I believe, if a placename is an official name (i.e. registered with the appropriate authority), it should simply be shown by that name ('Hurstville, New South Wales' in Paul's example). While Hurstville may be a suburb of the metropolis of Sydney, I believe it is not actually in the bounded locality of Sydney, just as Alfredton is a suburb of Ballarat, but is not within Ballarat. (Actually,

there is no bounded locality called Ballarat, we only have Ballarat East, Ballarat Central, and Ballarat North.) The inclusion of 'Sydney' in Paul's example is likely to lead to confusion. I believe 'Sydney' should only be included if Hurstville were not an official placename. (Travel is a different case, however, in which 'Sydney' may be used to explain the location of Hurstville to someone not familiar with the suburb, but would not be included in a postal address given to that person.)

Ron Woods

CGNA Report

The Annual Forum of the Committee for Geographical Names of Australasia (CGNA) saw delegates from the various naming authorities in Australia and New Zealand meet over two days in Brisbane at the beginning of September. Members reported various items that will be of interest to our readers. ACT, for instance, reported that 3 new division/suburb names will soon appear in Canberra (Denman Prospect, Molonglo, and Uriarra Village), as well as a new district name (Molonglo Valley). ACT Placenames is also working with other parts



of the government to produce interpretive signage for the 16 Canberra suburbs that honour former Prime Ministers. There's already one sign in the suburb of Bruce; visitors to Canberra will see others shortly.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GRMPA) has received a proposal that a reef be named to honour the late Patricia Mather, a respected researcher on sea cucumbers. The reef in question resembles the shape of one of these creatures, so that would be a fitting legacy, it was suggested. The public consultation period is now in its final stages.

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Lawrence Hargrave's Spanish Sydney

Lawrence Hargrave is rightly remembered for contributions to practical and theoretical aeronautic research in the late 19th century that led to powered flight. Such is his recognition, Hargrave was one of a handful of Australians chosen to represent our better selves when his portrait was included in the first series of Australian decimal banknotes issued in 1966¹. But another contribution he made has now almost been completely forgotten—a speculative secret Spanish history of Sydney, complete with its own placenames.

Hargrave was ridiculed for many years for flying kites and pursuing the folly of powered flight, but he took comfort when the Wright brothers and subsequent developments showed him to have been right—flight could be achieved and it would transform our world in unexpected ways. While he continued his research after 1903, aeronautics soon passed him by and eventually he became absorbed in another grand obsession that he believed would also turn disbelieving Australians' world upside down. Hargrave was convinced that Lope de Vega, a lost Spanish explorer, had sailed into Sydney Harbour in 1595, and that he had left abundant clues to his presence before being rescued in about 1600. Then de Vega ventured off to lose his life and place in history in Torres Strait.

How did it all begin? In 1877 Hargrave visited the Torres Strait island of Ugar². On the northern end of the island he encountered a small guarded hut, containing a cylindrical object measuring about 450 mm by 100 mm diameter, covered in resin into which were pressed hundreds of small, shiny red and black berries. The keeper's family had protected this ritual object for generations³. After writing it up in his diary Hargrave forgot about it until, in May 1906, a brief newspaper article about the recovery of some cannon from the Torres Strait seabed caused him to reflect on this earlier incident⁴. From his papers it is clear he immediately began to forge a link between the object in the hut and the sunken cannon, and to create a fantastical scenario in his imagination. Less than a week after the newspaper article he wrote to the London Missionary Society's missionary in Torres Strait, asking him to quiz local men and recover the figure, which he was sure contained objects and possibly the log of a lost Spanish voyage. Unfortunately previous missionaries had destroyed as much of the native's religious objects as possible during

the 1880s⁵.

Over the next three years Hargrave elaborated his basic idea into a complex historical narrative, deciding that the lost Spanish ship was the historically known *Santa Isabel* [alternatively *Ysabel*] commanded by Lope de Vega. Hargrave went public from mid-1909, with a stream of newspaper articles and letters, plus two papers to the august Royal Society of New South Wales, and continued to advocate for it until his death in May 1915⁶. Despite his best efforts, he convinced very few people of his ideas⁷. In fact, it is likely that his passionate advocacy for an earlier Spanish presence in Australia actually damaged his considerable scientific standing and as a result he failed to receive the recognition he was due for the contribution to flight until long after his death⁸.

Supposed Spanish placenames

At all points Hargrave carefully tied his Lope de Vega story to documentary sources or archaeological 'evidence' that he had painstakingly gathered. In brief the story went that in 1595 the three ships of Alvaro de Mendana's fleet to settle the Solomon Islands approached the erupting volcanic island of Tinakula, near the end of their voyage. In the confusion de Vega's ship lost contact. Searching failed to find her and it was assumed she had been sunk by volcanic debris⁹. Hargrave was convinced that the *Santa Ysabel* survived, that de Vega headed southwest, hit the Australian coast and made it into Sydney Harbour, setting up camp on Woollahra Point. He believed that once they were camped there the Spanish and their Peruvian crewmen fought continuously with the Aboriginal people they met, mounted expeditions in search of gold and generally tried to keep busy¹⁰.

Hargrave interpreted the many rock carvings at Woollahra Point and elsewhere around Sydney as proof of Spanish work. He argued that they had to be cut with metal tools, were beyond the capacity of inferior Aboriginal people to execute, and were intended to be a form of 'Aztec picture writing' as most of the crew would be barely literate¹¹. Eventually the survivors were discovered by a second Spanish ship, the *Santa Barbara*¹². They sailed up the coast, and the *Santa Barbara* supposedly foundered on Facing Island, near Gladstone. The other made it with Lope de Vega to Torres Strait, leaving in its wake the last clues to its passing, particularly the

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The five questions of Monteville

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Under Secretary of the Post and Telegraph Department in Brisbane relating to the naming of Montville. It contains the letter written by Henry Smith to the Under Secretary proposing *Montville* as the name for the receiving office after *Vermont* had been rejected. The main items of interest on the document are as follows:

*Subject of Communication: Name for R.O.
From whom received: H. Smith, Razorback
Date of Communication: 19.XI.97*

*Reply to No. A7810/97
Razorback via Palmwoods
Nov. 19th 1897*

The Under secretary, Post & Telegraph Dept., Brisbane

Sir

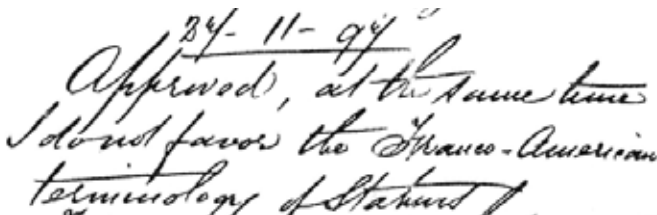
"Vermont" not being a suitable name for the proposed receiving office at this place, I beg to suggest "Montville".

*I am Sir,
Yours faithfully,
Henry Smith.*

The note dated 27-11-97 at the bottom of the document is especially interesting. It states:

Approved, at the same time I don't favour the Franco-American terminology of [indecipherable]

I wonder what that comment says about the prevailing attitudes towards the French and Americans during the late nineteenth century?



*34-11-97
Approved, at the same time
I do not favour the Franco-American
terminology of Stakent.*

Hannah Smith's obituary in *The Queenslander* (Saturday, 11th May 1901) portrays a remarkable woman:

An old colonist has just passed away from our midst (writes a correspondent) in the person of Mrs. Hannah Smith, at Montville, Blackall Range. Mrs. Smith was born in Worcestershire, England, in May, 1816. In 1869 she lost her husband, who was then 63 years of age, and was left with a

family of 16, four of whom were stepchildren. Since then her son Edward has devoted his life to the care of his mother and his younger brothers and sisters, and his self-sacrificing spirit has been a blessing to the whole family. After spending a few years in America, they started for Queensland, leaving some of the elder members behind. They arrived in Brisbane, in March, 1879, and settled at Redland Bay, where their sterling metal as useful colonists proved itself. A few years ago they removed to the Blackall Ranges, infusing new life and energy to the district. The youngest son, Henry, has made a name for himself as a nurseryman; he also keeps a store and the post office at Montville. Mrs. Smith impressed the writer, who has known her for a number of years, as a woman of remarkable energy and individuality of character, the sort of stem whose offshoots are invaluable to a country. Up to almost the day of her death she was up and doing, summer and winter, when most people are turning over for a morning snooze; the sun very rarely ever caught her abed. Their sojourn in the States doubtless helped to develop the spirit of enterprise and energy which has made the family a valuable asset to Queensland. Mrs. Smith passed away peacefully on the 17th instant at the ripe old age of 85 years and 11 months, without pain, simply falling asleep. The body was taken along the range to the Mapleton Cemetery, and a large gathering was present. Although it rained heavily, both sides of the road were lined with the school children, who presented a beautiful wreath to be added to those which covered the coffin as the procession passed through. The old lady has left behind her children to the third generation to inherit the sterling qualities developed in the character of their great-grandmother.

Thank you, Nona, for supplying us with this fascinating document! We can answer all five wh-questions with confidence:

Who named the place? Henry Smith

Why was it so named? To commemorate the home town of Hannah Smith's family

What does the name mean? From the French *mont* = 'mountain, ville = 'town'

Where does it come from (i.e. what language / region)? Transferred toponym from Connecticut

When was the name bestowed? 27 November 1897

Frederick Roche—a successful early settler

The naming of Roche Creek and the Parish of Rochedale, Western Queensland

The Parish of Rochedale was named for a land holding, as so many parishes were. The early pastoral runs were about the same size as the parishes, and when the time came to formalize land purchases in the Queensland colony this was a convenient division. The land was divided into Counties, Parishes and numbered Portions. Roche Creek, a tributary of the Dawson River, is the major creek on the old Rochedale pastoral run and the surrounding locality is named for the creek.

Frederick Roche and his brother took up a pastoral run in the Dawson River area in about 1850. In the early 1860s a drover, Joseph Wilson Raven, who took up Corinda run in 1863, called into Dalby on a trip north from inland NSW. The following is an extract from his *Reminiscences* which are on microfilm in the Mitchell Library, Sydney

...From here I went to 'Stonehenge' and on to the Darling Downs, through 'Gourie', 'Westbrook', 'John Darian' [Jondarian] to Dalby where I laid in a fresh stock of stores which I bought from a Mr. Roach [Roche] who kept the principal store in Dalby in those days. He formerly took up a station on the Dawson called 'Roachdale' where his brother was killed by the blacks, and after his death Mr. Roach sold the Station to Messrs. Royds Bros. of 'Joando' [Juandah] and invested the proceeds in this store in Dalby.

Frederick Roche was very successful in his new venture. He shows up in Post Office records as Storekeeper and District Registrar in 1856, and he was the first Mayor of Dalby in 1863 and again in 1868. He was also a magistrate. His name appears in the *Dalby Herald*, 24 May 1866 in a story about a gathering of Aborigines in the area. One was 'brought before Mr. Roche on Tuesday and remanded for a week.'

Although Frederick Roche spent only a short few years in the Dawson River area he is remembered there with three placenames, Rochedale Parish, Roche Creek and the locality of Roche Creek. He is remembered in Dalby with a street name and of course the honour of being the first mayor.

Dale Lehner

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Map from The Camp at Dogwood Crossing 1878 – 1978, from the Miles Centenary Committee

...Montville

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Jan Tent

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cylindrical object that Hargrave saw decades earlier, and which he was now convinced contained Lope de Vega's extraordinary account.

One particular line of possible evidence that Hargrave pursued was the idea that the Spanish had given placenames to their temporary home in c.1595-1600, and that these had been adopted by the Aboriginal people. After Sydney was established these names were recorded and mapped, unaware of their hidden legacy as part of the brief Spanish presence, until Hargrave revealed their true origin.

The following is my collation of placenames for which Hargrave claimed to have identified a Spanish derivation relating to the voyage and travels of Lope de Vega. It is based on his newspaper contributions and unpublished notes¹³. The following table shows the current name with any clarification in brackets, Hargrave's proposed original Spanish name, if supplied, in italics, and the English derivation of the Spanish name, again in brackets. A list survives with many of these names, plus another two dozen for which Hargrave appears to have been searching for Spanish origins without success.

In Port Jackson

Carrara [near Rose Bay]	<i>Carraca</i> ['the carrack's grid']
Kurraba [Point]	<i>Karraba</i> ['the station of the Caraba']
Tivoli [near Rose Bay]	<i>Tivoli</i> [a placename also used in Spanish South America]

Around Sydney

Barrenjoey [Head]	<i>Barangay</i> ['mooring place of the Barangay carrick', which was an Indian vessel worked with oars]
Berowra	<i>Berro</i> ['the water cress place']
Bilgola [Head]	<i>Pulgoso</i> ['abounding in fleas']
Careel [Bay]	<i>Carill</i> ['narrow road']
Colah	<i>Colah</i> ['to pass through a strait place']
Cronulla	<i>Corulla</i> ['room under the deck of a rowing galley']
Jibbon	<i>Jibion</i> ['cuttle fish bone plentiful']

Lawrence Hargrave's...

Maroubra	<i>Mar-rubra</i> ['the sea was red or rosy']
Meriverie [Ben Buckler]	<i>Mar-e-ver</i> ['sea view']
Patonga	<i>Par-tonga</i> ['the broad open ledge']
Quibray [Bay]	<i>Quibra</i> ['crack' - referring to the discovery of an Aboriginal stone knapping workshop, ie 'the flint cracking place']
Tamarama	<i>Dama rama</i> ['The lady', 'beating around the bush']

Torres Strait islands

Erub	<i>El-rub</i> ['the rosy coloured land']
Mabuiag	<i>Mar-be-ha</i> ['a vexed or confused sea']
Parremarr	<i>Bar-re-nar</i> ['to sink a ship']
Mer	<i>Ma-er</i> [no derivation proposed]
Ugar	<i>Ho-gar</i> ['fire place']
Bo-bo	<i>Bo-bo</i> ['the large island']
Daru	<i>Ya-ro</i> [corruption of Arum, meaning 'taro']

As can be seen, the derivation of many of these is tortuous, but Hargrave was always able to modify his Lope de Vega story slightly, and assert that the Spanish must have suffered a plague of fleas when first visiting Bilgola Head, or had found watercress at Berowra as they suffered scurvy; otherwise why would they choose such a name? Often he saw a placename in the news, and mused on it a while before coming up with an improbable Spanish derivation. This was always risky as Hargrave did not speak Spanish. He would find a similar sounding word, amend the Lope de Vega story sufficiently to place the Spaniards there and doing something that would justify the name. He had some help from Captain Bertram Chambers, a senior Royal Australian Navy officer and a rough, but enthusiastic, Spanish speaker. Chambers suggested several possible Torres Strait island name derivations that Hargrave later adopted.

One inscription at Meriverie [an alternative name for Ben Buckler, on the north head of Bondi] showing two

...Spanish Sydney

ships and scattered lettering was to Hargrave the barely literate 'Spanish Proclamation'¹⁴.



His generous translation was 'We in the Santa Barbara and Santa Ysabel conquered W ... from point to point'. 'W ...' was the land they conquered, and was either the Spanish name for Australia or the 'island' high bluff from Bondi to South Head, separated from the rest of Sydney by a channel through to Rose Bay, which Hargrave believed was open to the sea at that time. Norman Lindsay sketched a recreation of the scene for his article in the *Lone Hand* (see right).

Hargrave left his work unfinished at his death, exploring possible Spanish influence in the Kiwai language of the Papuan coast.

The lesson from this is, perhaps, that just because it seems to fit does not mean that it is true. How did an engineer and inventor of such a calibre as Hargrave believe his own idea, let alone be responsible for making it up and feeding it with increasingly elaborate and ill-fitting 'evidence'? I suspect that it is, at least in part, because Hargrave had been proven right about powered flight after years of being dismissed and ridiculed as a crank; he fully expected to be exonerated about Lope de Vega in turn. In part it was because the orthodoxy of Australian history was still being developed. Federation had seen the establishment of historical societies, a boom in local history and publication of sets of official records¹⁵. There were few people however with the skill and the time to pull apart Hargrave's argument in detail and force him to justify the various bits of evidence he used to build his case. His scientist friends grew apart from him as he became more fixated and obsessive in his thinking.

My interest in Lawrence Hargrave comes from my PhD research that looks at the belief that Australia received other maritime 'secret visitors' who mapped, landed or even settled parts of Australia before the confirmed Dutch landing in 1606¹⁶. However far-fetched some of their claims and ideas are, these people are not buffoons; Hargrave certainly was not. They have come to placename studies as many of us have—because they believe that somehow placenames capture and can reveal the richness and complexity of a lost past. Their mistake is to try to lead the evidence in a certain direction, rather than to let it take us where it may, which will always prove to be a far richer, more complex and ultimately more satisfying journey of discovery.



Postscript

Hargrave was right that Lope de Vega and the *Santa Ysabel* did not perish at Tinakula. Archaeological remains of the *Santa Ysabel* survivors' camp have been found at Pamua on the island of Makira in the southern Solomon Islands, showing that Lope de Vega never made it anywhere near Sydney¹⁷. Sydney University archaeologist Dr Martin Gibbs is currently investigating the site. While some of the island names in the Solomons commemorate Mendana's discovery, it is not known if any of the placenames near Pamua ultimately derive from direct Spanish interaction in the way Hargrave may have desired.

Denis Gojak

Department of Archaeology, University of Sydney

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_____ (b) 'Lope de Vega'. *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 43 (1909): 39-54, 412-425.

_____ (c) *Lope de Vega: in continuation of previous publications contained in the Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales, vols XLIII, XLIV, 1909, 1910*, Sydney: Frederick W. White, 1911.

_____ (d) 'Meriverie' [letter to editor]. *Daily Telegraph [Sydney]*, 9 October 1913.

_____ (e) 'Old place name' [letter to editor]. *Daily Telegraph [Sydney]*, 24 October 1913.

_____ (f) Lope de Vega. Unpublished manuscript [1914], National Library of Australia, Hargrave Papers, Manuscript 352 - Item 10.

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Endnotes

¹Hargrave's life has received biographical treatments from Salier 1929, Shaw 1977, Grainger 1978 and Inglis 1983. Maiden 2000 and Goode 1977 cover some of Hargrave's early Queensland, Torres Strait and Papuan years.

²Hargrave refers to it as *Hogar* or *Ho-Gar*. *Ugar* and *Stephens Island* are the current official names.

³Hargrave's meticulously kept journals and correspondence are held in the Powerhouse Museum and National Library of Australia. Material prior to 1910 is mainly in the Powerhouse's collection.

⁴*Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 2 May 1906, p. 10. These records allow an almost day-by-day mapping of his ideas.

⁵In a twist an elderly Ugar woman said that the cylinder had been taken and buried for safety before the hut was burned down by the missionaries. A ship's crew then spent a week turning over the island unsuccessfully in search of it.

⁶Representative newspaper articles and letters to the Editor are *Sydney Morning Herald* 1909, Hargrave (a). Hargrave's paper to the Royal Society of NSW [Hargrave (b)] was in two parts, presented in June and December. He repeatedly offered a third part, which was refused by the committee, and instead had to publish it himself [Hargrave (c)].

⁷In fact Hargrave had no followers until secret visitor advocate Michael Terry 1969 provided sympathetic coverage of his ideas in the 1960s.

⁸Salier 1929; Shaw 1977.

⁹For Mendana's expedition see Spate 1979. Hargrave's account follows accepted historical paths until the separation of the ships at Tinakula.

¹⁰Hargrave (b), (c), (f).

¹¹RH Mathews [1910] wrote a response to Hargrave's claims affirming Aboriginal origins of the engravings. See Attenbrow 2002 for current knowledge about the rock engravings around Sydney. Hargrave was inspired by his reading of Prescott 1903 to believe that Aztec picture writing would be familiar to the South Americans on board. His racist attitude to Aboriginal people was probably close to the social norm in this period.

¹²The ship's name comes from a cannon dated 1596 found on the Queensland coast. The name *Santa Barbara* most likely refers to the patron saint of artillerymen, rather than the name of a ship.

¹³See Hargrave (d), (e), (f) letters to newspapers, outlining aspects of his theory about placenames. These references are found throughout his papers and drawings and sources will not be listed separately.

¹⁴Hargrave (c); Lindsay 1913.

¹⁵Fletcher 1993; Griffiths 1996.

¹⁶See my blog - <http://secretvisitors.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁷Allen and Green 1972.

Khancoban revisited

In our September 2009 issue Mark Oldrey discussed possible origins of the name for Khancoban in the Snowy Mountains of NSW. The question has been a live one for some time, and it recently drew a response from **John Murphy**. John's research is brought to us by courtesy of the Corryong Courier.

'Khan Coban'¹, 'Khancoban'², 'Cancobin'³, 'Kancobin'⁴ are various forms of spelling for the locality collected over the years by this correspondent, and no doubt there are many other alternative nomenclatures that remain to be collected. The first two variations, one of which is current today, officially date back to 1848 but were no doubt in local use well before that time.



*The Cobberas (no. 1) just south of Forest Hill
(photo: John Murphy)*

A previous suggestion was that Khancoban earned its name because early convicts built a number of stone dwellings or cairns there. This belief cannot be supported by the evidence as there were no convicts assigned to work in the Khancoban District during the early years of colonisation, and certainly no soldiers available to guard them. In 1841 the closest Government outpost was based at Tumut, under the command of Commissioner Henry Bingham⁵. He had barely enough resources in the way of men, horses and equipment to collect squatters' license fees, resolve boundary disputes and look after the bushranging problem, let alone oversee and supervise convict gangs at labour. There were of course a number of ticket-of-leave and other ex-government men (freed convicts) working about the district, Welaregang Station being an example. Also, stone buildings would surely leave some trace despite the passing of 175 years; and even if the building materials were totally scavenged, some recollection of their former existence would surely be preserved in the collective memory of local families. To my knowledge there is none.

As Mark Oldrey suggested, there has been much speculation as to whether the name *Khancoban* had an Indian origin, as two early holders (though not the original holders) were retired officers from the British Indian Army. Records show that these ex-officers, Grant and W. P. Trevallyon⁶, were established there in 1848. I think, however, we need not go as far afield as the sub-continent to seek out the meaning or origin of the word, but perhaps look closer to home, to clues in both our history and our landscape.

When the discoverer of Gippsland, Angus McMillan, was seeking out pasture for his employer's (Lachlan Macalister) cattle, he reached Macfarlane's Currowang Station on the Monaro in 1839, and he readily fell in with the local aborigines. Students of Australian history will well know of the devastating drought and depression that gripped the colony during this period, and the desperate shortage of feed for horses, sheep and cattle.

From conversations with members of the tribe, McMillan learnt of a vast swathe of flat, open, well-grassed plains, previously unknown to the colonists (or at least their existence unproven), which the Monaro aborigines, the Ngarigo, called 'cabone benel'⁷. These plains were said to be located many days walk through the mountains to the south-west and near the coast (Bass Strait); and when he came into possession of this information, McMillan was determined to seek them out for his employer. McMillan's first two forays into Gippsland were both disastrous, and very nearly cost him his life. But undaunted he tried a third time, and for this expedition he obtained the assistance of two aborigines from the Omeo (Jaitmathang) Tribe. They were 'Cabone Johnny',⁸ the head man of the Omeo tribe (whose real name was probably Jar.gi.ar)⁹ and a native boy whom McMillan christened Friday. McMillan described Cabone Johnny as 'a noble looking fellow, with bold and determined appearance'¹⁰ and he considered that he would be a great asset to the exploring party, which subsequently proved true, as their guides proved themselves indispensable.

Amongst the various records through the 1800s and early 1900s of McMillan's exploits, Cabone Johnny is variously described as 'Cobbone Johnny'¹¹, 'Cobbon Johnny'¹²,

continued next page

‘Cobban Johnny’¹³ and ‘Cobborn Johnny’¹⁴; the first part of his adopted and partially Anglicised name referred to his stature. From various sources the Monaro and Omeo aborigines were described as ‘a fine athletic race of more than ordinary stature and good form’.¹⁵

Therefore from the nomenclature used at the time (late 1830s/early 1840s) we might cautiously assume that from the Monaro and Omeo languages that Cobone, Cobbon, or Cobban means ‘large, tall or vast’. Further support for this assumption lies in the landscape some 70 kilometres to the south of Khancoban, in the ‘Head of the Murray’ country, near Forest Hill.

South of Cowombat Flat (derived from *Kauwambat* meaning ‘woman’ in the Wolgal dialect¹⁶) stands a rugged cluster of mountains known as the Cobbora Range. This irregular range is surmounted by two peaks nowadays designated as Cobberas 1 and Cobberas 2, the former being the taller. These mountains delineated the eastern boundary of the Jaitmathang’s tribal territory from that of the Ngarigo tribes of the Monaro.¹⁷ Cobberas 1 standing at 1814 metres, is also the biggest mountain in the immediate area, with nearby Pilot measuring 1798 metres. *Cobbera* or *Cobbora* is said to mean ‘head’,¹⁸ as does *Cobram*,¹⁹ a town situated further down the river below Albury-Wodonga.

From the information above we might cautiously infer that *-coban*, in *Khancoban*, also relates to either ‘head’ or something ‘vast’, ‘large’ or ‘tall’. It is interesting to note that when John Lhotsky visited the Monaro in the 1830s he recorded many words from the vocabulary of the Monaro tribe. Amongst them was *Kabon* which meant ‘big’.²⁰

As for the first part of the place name (*Khan*), its true meaning may be lost forever but perhaps our nation’s capital could offer some insight. *Canberra*, or *Canberry*, which some sources suggest derives from the Ngabri word *kambarra* is often quoted (though disputed in some quarters) as meaning a ‘meeting place’²¹ (others cruelly suggest an asylum!) while another source records that it come from *nganbirra* meaning a ‘camping ground’.²² The situations are very similar; people meet where they camp. The tribes of the Upper Murray were known to meet with tribes as far away as Yass²³ and there certainly would have been a diffusion of words and meanings between the numerous dialects or language groups.

Therefore we could hazard a guess that *Khancoban* could mean ‘big camping ground’ (like Wahgunyah – ‘big camp’). There is plentiful evidence in the Khancoban valley to support this and the location is on the direct pathway to Geehi from where the tribes ascended to the Munyang Bogongs (the Kosciuszko massif and adjacent peaks) via Hannel’s Spur, or Dicky Cooper’s Bogong by following up the course of the Swampy Plains River to its source.

John Murphy

Endnotes

- ¹ *NSW Government Gazette*, 10 October, 1848
- ² *NSW Government Gazette*, 10 October, 1848
- ³ ‘Death of Mr Thomas Mitchell, Bringemrongo’. *Wodonga & Towong Sentinel*, 7 October, 1887
- ⁴ *Geological Map of the Parish of Thowgla*, 40 Chain to 1”. ‘Kancobin’ is the adjoining parish. Map compiled by J.G. Easton. Published by Victorian Mines Dept. 1927
- ⁵ ‘Government Camp at Tumut under the Command of Commissioner Henry Bingham’. *Australasian Chronicle*, 18 September, 1841
- ⁶ *NSW Government Gazette* ‘Claims to leases of Crown Land Beyond the Settled Districts’, 10 October, 1848
- ⁷ ‘Death of Mr M’Millan’. *Gippsland Times*, 20 May 1865
- ⁸ ‘Death of Mr M’Millan’. *Gippsland Times*, 20 May 1865
- ⁹ *The Aboriginal People of the Monaro*. Compiled by Michael Young with Ellen & Debbie Mundy. 2000. p. 355
- ¹⁰ ‘Death of Mr M’Millan’. *Gippsland Times*, 20 May 1865
- ¹¹ ‘Cobbone Johnny (Chief of the Omeo Tribe)’. Extract from the *Diary of Angus McMillan* (1862) as published in Richard Mackay’s *Recollections of the Gippsland Goldfields*. 1916. p. 88
- ¹² *Cobbone Johnny – Letters from Victorian Pioneers by Thomas Francis Bride, LL.D* (During his period of office as Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria). 1898. p. 204
- ¹³ ‘Cobban Johnny’. *The Victorian Historical Magazine* 141, August 1965, p. 104
- ¹⁴ Rusden, G.W. *History of Australia* vol. II. 1884. p. 62
- ¹⁵ *The Aboriginal People of the Monaro* Compiled by Michael Young with Ellen & Debbie Mundy. 2000. p. 118 (Originally from Perkins Papers and possibly originally from *Monaro Mercury*)
- ¹⁶ Howitt, A.W. *The Native Tribes of South East Australia*. 1904. p. 78
- ¹⁷ Howitt, *op.cit.* pp. 77, 78
- ¹⁸ Reed, A.W. *Aboriginal Place Names*. 1967. p. 28
- ¹⁹ *The Aboriginal and Other Meanings of many of our Region’s Town Names*. www.albury.net.au/~tim/chdoma10.htm
- ²⁰ Flood, Josephine. *The Moth Hunters*. 1980. p. 359 (Collected by John Lhotsky, 1830s)
- ²¹ Watson, Frederick. *A Brief History of Canberra*. 1927. p. 14 (and various other sources)
- ²² Gillespie, Lyall. *Aborigines of the Canberra Region*. Canberra: Wizard, 1984
- ²³ ‘Records of the Olden Days – Biography of Thomas Wilkinson’. *The Albury Banner & Wodonga Express*, 29 July, 1904

Out & About...



with Joyce Miles

Wandering around the South Coast of WA (Part III)

Albany

The port of **Albany** is located on King George Sound which was named *King George the Third's Sound* in 1791 by Captain Vancouver, the British explorer. It is the State's oldest settlement.¹ In 1826 a French naval officer, Dumon d'Urville, visiting the area said 'I cannot understand why the British have not already occupied such a fine place'. Fearing France's interest, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Bathurst, ordered Governor Darling to establish settlements at Fremantle and King George Sound. The Governor despatched the successful explorer, Major Edmund Lockyer, accompanied by twenty soldiers and twenty-four convicts, on the brig

Amity to establish a military camp. They arrived on Christmas Day 1826 and within ten days of arriving buildings had been erected and a garden dug. It was from here that Lockyer set out to explore inland Western Australia.² Initially the area was referred to as *King George Sound* or *King George's Sound*, although Major Lockyer suggested it be named *Frederickstown* in honour of Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.³ It was administered by NSW until 1831 when authority was passed to the Swan River Colony (later known as the Colony of Western Australia.) The following year Governor James Stirling renamed the town **Albany**, a name which still retained its link with Prince Frederick.⁴

Endnotes

¹ Murray, Ian and Goodchild, Brian. *Araruen to Zaanthus. A Gazetteer of Perth Suburbs and Western Australian Towns*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Press, 2003. p.98

² Cannon, Michael. *The Exploration of Australia*. Sydney: Readers Digest, 1987. pp. 92, 114

³ Murray and Goodchild, *op. cit.*, p.76

⁴ Appleton, Richard and Barbara. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Australian Places*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992. p. 3

Placenames Puzzle Number 44

Historical Significants:

The clues reveal placenames relating to people/events of some historical significance e.g. (NSW) Participated in the destruction of the Armada, 1588 ... Drake

1. (NSW) He worked for universal abolition of slavery
2. (NSW) Introduced potatoes and tobacco to England
3. (NSW) First name of the inventor of the 'bouncing bomb'
4. (NSW) 15th century civil war—Lancaster/York; cricket score
5. (NSW) Location of an enormous Wonder of the World
6. (ACT) In 1829 he established the London Police Force
7. (TAS) One of the world's longest rivers—Lake Victoria to the Mediterranean
8. (WA) Modern name of what was once the capital of Roman Britain
9. (SA) Scene of the Charge of the Light Brigade
10. (SA) In 1789 the Bastille was stormed here; small stream
11. (QLD) Site in Ireland where William III defeated James II; land surrounded by water
12. (QLD) It was built by Cheops around 2700BC
13. (VIC) South African town besieged for 217 days by Boers, 1899
14. (VIC) Field Marshal who played a major role in the victory at Alamein
15. (VIC) The 'man with the donkey' at Gallipoli
16. (NSW/SA) The church of the first Pope
17. (NSW/VIC) Victor at Trafalgar
18. (TAS/VIC) Supposed place of the signing of Magna Carta 1215
19. (TAS/VIC) Site of the first decisive victory by the Normans over the Anglo Saxons
20. (SA/TAS/VIC/WA) Napoleon was defeated here in 1815

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Answers:

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|-------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| 17. Nelson | 18. Runnymede | 19. Hastings | 20. Waterloo | 13. Marekling | 14. Montgomery | 15. Simpson | 16. St Peters | 9. Balaklava | 10. aris Creek | 11. Boyne Island | 12. Pyramid | 5. Rhodes | 6. Peel | 7. Nile | 8. York | 1. Wilberforce | 2. Raleigh | 3. Barnes | 4. Roses Run |
|------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|-------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|------------|-----------|--------------|

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