

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



Watanobbi:

A cautionary tale for toponymists



Linguists are well aware of the phenomenon known as folk etymology, the tendency to re-interpret (and sometimes re-shape) words to fit a presumed story of origin. Well-worn examples from English 100 include

BELFRY: from *berfrei* 'watch tower'; the spelling changed from *ber-* to *bel-* because everyone knew that church towers generally had bells in them.

POSH: from an obsolete British slang word for 'dandy'; but the made-up story of 'port out, starboard home' was so good it had to be true.

SPARROW-GRASS: from *asparagus*, a foreign technical word that didn't have an obvious meaning to those who heard it for the first time.

Toponymists know too that placenames are open to exactly the same process. Three NSW toponyms provide typical examples.

DORRIGO: the made-up story of Don Dorrigo, a Spanish general, was much more attractive than the real origin, the Gumbainggir word for 'stringybark'

YASS: various anecdotes about Aboriginal trackers

saying 'yass, boss' are more attractive than the truth, that it's an aboriginal word *yarb* for 'running water'.

DEE WHY: from surveyor James Meehan's 1815 field note *Dy Beach*, of unknown meaning; but the numerous other stories, while fictional, are less prosaic. (Supposedly, from Aboriginal *diwai* 'a bird that frequented the lagoon'; or from D + Y, the shape of the beach and lagoon seen from the ocean; or from the carved initials of a shipwrecked survivor of the Spanish galleon *Dona Ysabel*;

or from James Cook's chart in 1775 [sic], because the lagoon which blocked his way reminded him of Offa's Dyke between the rivers Dee and Wye.)

The DORRIGO and YASS examples are probably more typical than is DEE WHY, in that Aboriginal-language origins are more obscure and more likely to give rise to folk stories. And, of course, it's unusual that in the case of Dee Why we have documented proof of the origin of a placename without any clue given as to its meaning.

So when a controversy arose a few years ago about Watanobbi, this informed my view of what was likely to be true of the name's origin. Watanobbi is a suburb in the Shire of Wyong, north of Sydney, developed nearly 50 years ago on a 270 acre site originally settled by a Mr Alfred Chapman. The name has been in use since the mid-1960s, but many of the current residents are less than enthusiastic about it.

The Shire Council was petitioned in 2000 to have the name changed, and the issue was referred to the NSW Geographical Names Board. In the deliberations by

continued on page 4

From the Editor



Our two main articles this month are, as promised, from the ANPS Workshop which was held in Brisbane last September. One is a contemporary study of a controversial placename near Sydney; the other looks at the 19th century historical data for a Queensland placename. Each in its own way is a demonstration of how we go about doing placenames research.

Our regular correspondent Geoff Minett has done double duty in this issue: as well as an article from his home territory on the NSW north coast, he's summarised the story of Norseman, WA, for us. And, thanks to feedback from readers, we're able to update our investigations into Warrell Creek and Khancoban. We can look forward to two stimulating articles in our forthcoming June edition. Rupert Gerritsen will bring us up-to-date on another controversial placename, *Point Danger*. And Jan Tent has ventured to the dangerous waters of *Christmas Island* for us.

David Blair

Joyce Miles

We are very sad to report that Joyce Miles, our Vice-President, died in January this year after a year-long illness. We know that all of our readers will miss Joyce's regular contributions to *Placenames Australia*—not only her informative and entertaining short



articles on the many Australian towns that she had researched for us, but also the placename quizzes that she faithfully prepared for each issue.

Typically, Joyce had thought ahead as her health began to deteriorate and she had lodged a number of articles and quizzes for us to use throughout 2012. This issue of *Placenames Australia* is the first since March 2002 that lacks her by-line.

Joyce was already an established scholar in onomastics when she arrived in Australia, with research at Leicester and Exeter to her credit. Her work to that point had been in the analysis of house names in their social context, with particular reference to the growth of

suburbia. She had written three books on the subject, and when she arrived in Sydney she continued that work along with her research in placenames.

She had been advised to make contact with our Survey (then an activity of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Toponymy at Macquarie University, where David Blair was serving as Dean of Humanities as well as Director of the Survey). She was somewhat taken aback to discover that she was not led to a dusty back room filled with toponymists but to the Dean's slightly palatial office where she was welcomed with an offer of tea and biscuits. The unassuming Joyce Miles could not believe that she would be received into a university department in such a fashion. Those who have been privileged to work with her since will know that this aspect of her nature never changed.

Joyce's interests, of course, were wider than the various forms of naming. She had many friends in Historical Societies around NSW, and in various clubs of Soroptimist International. All will miss her—the warmth of her friendship and the vivacity of her conversation made her a much-loved colleague.

We extend our deepest sympathy to her husband John and to the extended family.

This newsletter is published quarterly by
Placenames Australia Inc ABN 39 652 752 594
ISSN: 1836-7968 (print) 1836-7976 (online)

Editor: David Blair
PO Box 5160
SOUTH TURRAMURRA NSW 2074

Wilkie Creek and Daandine Station

Wilkie Creek is a tributary of the Condamine River, which it joins on the western fringes of Queensland's Darling Downs. It was named for John Perrell Wilkie who held the surrounding pastoral run from the mid 1840s to about 1866. Wilkie's adventures include two shipwrecks and brushes with bushrangers and unfriendly Aborigines.

John Perrell Wilkie was aboard the schooner *Active* in July 1836 when it was wrecked on a reef in the Fiji group of islands. After some further adventures the captain and mate from the *Active*, along with Wilkie, were rescued and delivered to the island of Rotuma the following November. Sometime later they were taken aboard the whaling ship *Duke of York* 'in most cordial fashion' and all went well until 14 August 1837 when the *Duke of York* was also shipwrecked. The thirty-two people on board took to the three whale boats and on 26 August reached Moreton Bay minus two members who had been killed by 'blacks' while attempting to procure water. There Wilkie boarded the *James Watt* bound for Sydney.



In 1843 we hear of Wilkie in the Hunter River area when he signed a document with others seeking to import 'coolies' from India as labourers.¹ He settled in Murrurundi, NSW, and in the mid 1840s took up a leased pastoral run known as *Monaghan's Creek* further north on the Darling Downs. By this time he was in his

mid thirties and recently married. The run soon became known locally as *Wilkie's Creek* but in 1852 he registered it formally as *Daandine*, an Aboriginal word thought to mean 'owl'.² Nevertheless, the major creek on the property has retained Wilkie's name to the present day.

There had been a great economic depression shortly before Wilkie took up the run and he struggled. In 1847 he unsuccessfully sought a partner to ease his financial difficulties³ and he was recorded in the New South Wales Government Gazette as disputing boundaries with his neighbours, the Crowders of Braemar Forest.⁴ The run was transferred to Morehead and Young in 1852, probably as holders of Wilkie's mortgage.

A visit to the isolated outpost from the Rev. Benjamin Glennie in 1851 was celebrated with the baptism of three Wilkie sons, one named Archibald Daandine. A fourth son was born in 1853 but sadly the eldest died the following year. In the mid 1850s Wilkie also had a problem with one of his station hands, Fred Ward, who stole two good horses and set off for the New

England district. There he became well known as the bushranger Captain Thunderbolt.⁵ After these misfortunes Wilkie took his family to Bath in England for a period of about six years, leasing the property to Charles Coxen who was later elected to the Queensland parliament. Coxen Creek west of Charters Towers is named for him. The Wilkie family resumed the lease on their return but further problems arose.

On 18 May 1866 a letter from Daandine signed J.P. Wilkie arrived at the Dalby Police Station for Mr. Upjohn, the Sub-Inspector. Wilkie complained that the Aborigines gathered in the district for the annual distribution of blankets to celebrate Queen Victoria's

[continued on page 6](#)

both Council and the Board, the origin of the existing name became an issue. Three different views of its origin were current.

- It came from an unfavourable remark by Mr Chapman when he first viewed his land – ‘what a nobby piece of land’.
- It was derived from the Japanese surname Watanabe.
- It was derived from an Aboriginal word meaning ‘hills surrounded by water’.

A The Aboriginal-origin interpretation

My initial reaction to the issue was that, as with so many other toponyms in Australia, an Aboriginal language origin was the most likely; other competing theories looked too much like folk etymologies. The most widely publicised origin is, in fact, that the word meant ‘hills surrounded by water’ in an unspecified Aboriginal language. There were, of course, good reasons to be sceptical about such an etymology. The reputed meaning does sound very like those conventional meanings that one finds listed in popular collections of euphonious Aboriginal words; and it’s all a bit too convenient that the estate is, in fact, within a hilly area near water! More seriously, no vocabulary lists have been identified from the region that contain a word like *wattanobbi*.

So what might there be that supports this theory? Well, the attention of the Geographical Names Board was drawn to some references to *wata* and its derivatives in various publications. The southern Sydney suburb of Wattamolla bears a name recorded by Matthew Flinders as meaning ‘place near running water’. However, it’s not in the same language area as Wyong; and the only other relevant item which was noted (*wata* = ‘water’) comes from even further away: it’s from Torres Strait pidgin¹.

What about the *-nobby* element? There certainly is a hill and location north-east of Moree in northern NSW called Blue Nobby. But the entry for this Gamilaraay word in the relevant dictionary² makes it clear that it was originally *nhaayba* ‘knife’. And in any case, the lack of close relationship between the two languages is hardly helpful to the case. There are various other ‘nobby’ placenames around NSW, of course, but none has a posited Aboriginal origin: most, one imagines, are based on topographical shape or on a person’s name.

The Shire Council asked the representatives of the

Darkinjung people, the original inhabitants, if they were aware of the word’s origin or of any other word for that area; they were unable to assist, and reported only that they were happy with the current name and not supportive of any proposal to change it.

So my favoured interpretation was found to have no supporting evidence, and at this stage of the investigation could, at best, be left on the table to face off against the other possibilities.

B The Japanese Interpretation

When the Estate was released in 1966, the Council used a surveyor called John Hunter to mark out the lots. When asked later, he could not remember where the name came from although he rather thought it came from Mr Chapman himself. He had a theory, however. He’d noted that ‘the streets were named with a military/patriotic flavour’ and so wondered if General Watanabe, of World War II fame, was being honoured.

Needless to say, there are some problems with this suggestion. Firstly, the street names in question included Dunrossil, Cutler, Casey, Northcott, Partridge, (all respected governors and/or VC winners) and Britannia. The notion that the name of a Japanese general, whether war criminal or not, would be suggested by Chapman as a title for the whole estate stretches the bounds of credulity. Secondly, Chapman had died in 1963, several years before any street names were to be considered—so the connection between street names and estate name was non-existent, at least as far as Mr Chapman was concerned. Thirdly, although Watanabe is the fifth-most common Japanese surname (shared by various politicians, musicians, entertainers, and the President of Toyota Motor Corporation), there was no Japanese general of that name. I rather suspect that Mr Hunter was remembering Sergeant Mutsuhiro Watanabe, a POW prison guard later classified as a Class-A war criminal but who went to ground and thereby escaped trial and execution.

The Japanese interpretation is off the table, I believe.

C The Chapman Story

The Geographical Names Board, as its minutes record, shared my sceptical view of the anecdote that’s been a commonly-recounted tale about Watanobbi’s origin. It

... a cautionary tale

declared on 17 May 2001 that it found ‘not convincing’ the origin as being Mr Chapman’s remark that the land he’d bought was ‘a nobby area of land’. Partly, my disbelief was based on the fact that *nobby* is not recorded as an Australian expression that can be applied to topography. It certainly sounds more like a back-story than a sensible explanation.

However, there are two linguistic aspects of the problem that I should have considered.

- One is that the spelling in the account may be misleading. If you search the *Macquarie Dictionary* for *knobby* in the relevant sense, you find it recorded as the adjective corresponding to *knob*, ‘a rounded lump or protuberance on the surface of something; a rounded hill or mountain’.
- The other is that the *National Gazetteer of Australia* lists seven features that are Knobby, including a hill, a spur and a ridge, as well as three Knob Hills and a Knob Canyon.

And then came the surprise. After Mr Chapman died in 1963, the trustees of his estate decided to subdivide the land. Among the trustees were Mr Kevin Booth, Mr Bert Ashwell (a Wyong realtor) and Mr Dave Walker (of Walkers Sawmill). Mr Booth wrote to Council in July 2000 and addressed a meeting of Council shortly afterwards, confirming the content of his letter.

In summary, Mr Booth claimed:

1. that in 1950 or thereabouts one of his co-trustees, Dave Walker, heard Mr Chapman refer to the land as ‘knobby’;
2. that 18 years later Mr Walker and the other trustee, Mr Ashwell, concocted the name *Watanobbi* (presumably in pseudo-Aboriginal style) as a jocular reference to Mr Chapman’s original assessment of the property.
3. that they selected other names for streets in honour of Mr Chapman and his wife.

What value do we put on this evidence? It’s not first-hand, admittedly; and in court it would be rejected as hearsay evidence. But its probability value is nevertheless strong: the written statement comes from the trustees of the Chapman estate who were involved in the subdivision. Mr Booth in his letter to Council confirmed that

‘Bert Ashwell and Dave Walker were discussing the

subdivision and Mr Walker recalled Mr Chapman’s statement and with a little literacy licence they decided on “Watanobbi” as a fitting name for the newly created estate.’

The implication (‘with a little literacy [sic] licence’) that the naming suggestion was jocular has an undeniable ring of truth about it.

Conclusion

We have, then, one possible interpretation (the Aboriginal language theory) with no supporting evidence; a second (the Japanese general theory) which is now seen to be merely an implausible guess; and a third (the Chapman anecdote) which is strongly supported by a respected colleague of the original participants.

So the Chapman theory, against all my expectations, turns out to be the winner—and provides a salutary lesson that our usual presuppositions, even those well-founded on long experience and linguistic expertise, can sometimes lead us to the wrong answer.

Endnotes

¹ Thieberger, N. and W. McGregor, (eds). *Macquarie Aboriginal Words*. Sydney: Macquarie Library, 1994. p. 384.

² Ash, A., J. Giacon and A Lissarrague, (eds). *Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay, & Yuwaalayaay Dictionary*. Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2003.

David Blair

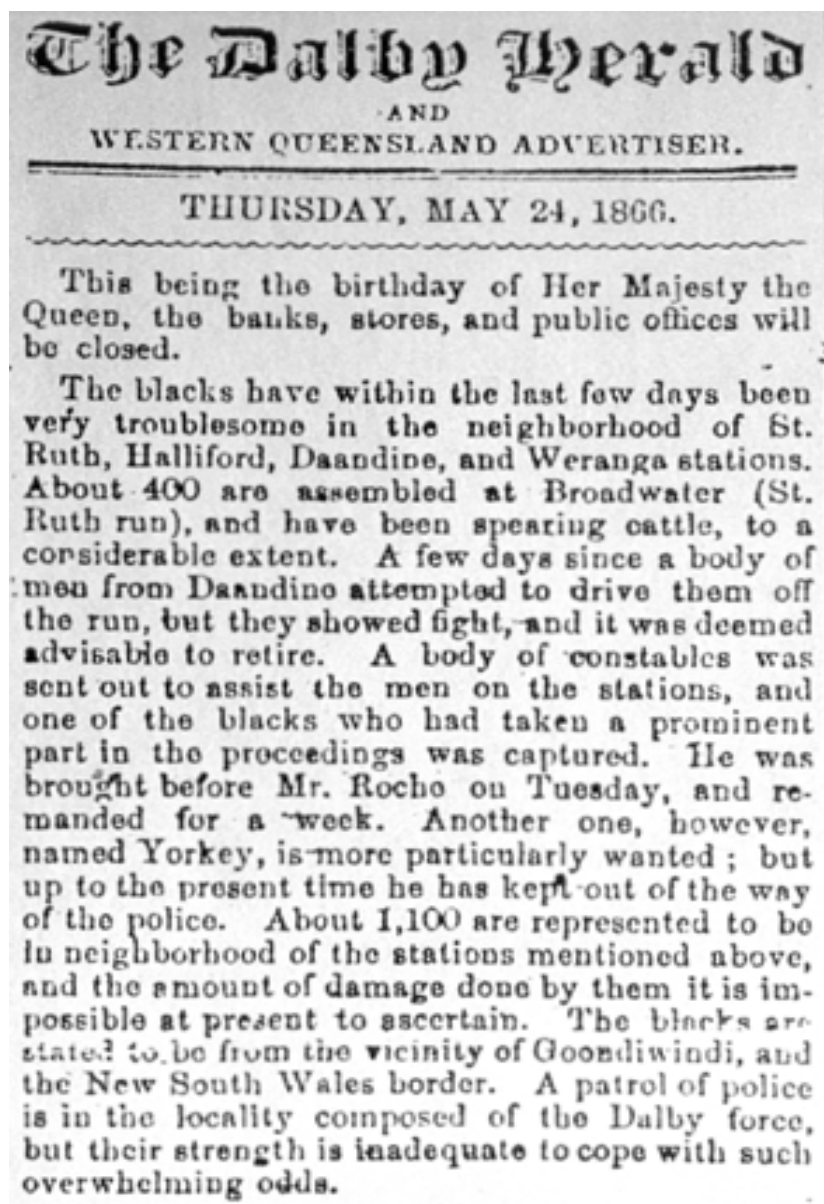
Thredbo and Bredbo

Thredbo and Bredbo are settlements in southern New South Wales. The general view is that the names are Aboriginal in origin, but the case has not yet been properly made.

The issue has been bugging us for some time, so we’ve sent two of our best operatives to investigate. But in the meantime, we’d be very glad to hear from anyone who knows of any evidence which might lead to the case being solved.

Send an email to:

editor@anps.org.au



The Dalby Herald reports the events on the Daandine run in May 1866

birthday 'were all over my Run'. His men had tried to disperse the mob on several occasions but were afraid of their dogs 'which were in hundreds'. He said that they were 'doing serious injury to my cattle'. In a second letter on 21 May, Wilkie described the group as exceeding '1500 in number and accompanied by 500 dogs'. The police believed that Wilkie was in a state of panic as other station holders were not alarmed. In the end it was generally believed that 'Yorkey', an Aborigine from the Burnett district, had been killed during an altercation with Wilkie's men. Wilkie's head stockman denied shooting him because of a problem with his gun

and his story was supported by the police constables who were present. Nevertheless, grief-stricken wailing from the Burnett Aborigines led people to believe Yorkey had been shot.

At this point John Perell Wilkie was 55 years old and in a precarious financial position. There was a period of drought and a severe financial crisis in the colony. He soon relinquished his interest in the station.

In 1879 Wilkie was 67 years old and settled in Dalby when Jane, his wife of 36 years, died. He married again to a 42 year old widow and supported himself looking after the pound. He employed two boys to impound the many stray horses found in the area.⁶ Wilkie died in 1883 aged 71 years.

In addition to the creek, a nearby parish also bears his name although it does not encompass his original land holding. *Daandine*, the run name chosen by Wilkie, also remains as the name of the parish and that of the locality around Wilkie Creek.

Dale Lehner

Acknowledgments

'Family History Report' – C. Wilkie of Stafford, Qld and an undated and unsourced document outlining the life of J.P. Wilkie held by Alan Wilkie of Dalby; *Dalby Herald*; Lehner, Dale. *In Search of Dad's Country*. self-published, 2004.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Indian Labour* NSW 1843 P29 A2029.
- ² *NSW Government Gazette* 1848 pp.158, 951 and 30 July 1852, p.1115; Ashton, Chris. *Wambo, the Changing Face of Rural Australia*. Wambo Shire Council, 2003. p.118.
- ³ *Crown Lands Letter Book Darling Downs* 1843 – 1848 A1764.2, 14 August 1847.
- ⁴ *NSW GG* 4 July 1849.
- ⁵ Lack, Clem. in *Royal Historical Society of Qld Bulletin*, March 1970.
- ⁶ Jack, Stewart. 'History of Dalby and District'. 1940s, privately distributed, p.166.

Kinchela, NSW

Kinchela is a locality situated near where Kinchela Creek flows into the Macleay River, north-east of Kempsey in the NSW parish of Arakoon. No origin for the name *Kinchela* is officially recorded.

In 1858 surveyor Ernst Herborn was instructed by the Surveyor-General to mark out a portion of land along the McLeay River (as it was then spelt). The NSW Government Gazette of 24 December 1861 listed lands that had been reserved for sale at the entrance to the river, and the parish maps of Arakoon reveal the first selectors. They are identified as:

Edward Ball—selected 4/2/1862 (Kinchela)
John Marshall—selected 24/6/1862 (Kinchela)

No further indication is given as to the location or origin of Kinchela.

In 1866 Herborn submitted to the government his town plan for Arakoon. Kempsey itself was well-established by that time, and a number of villages below Kempsey on the lower river were listed: Frederickton, Dark-water (later renamed Gladstone by Earl Belmore, after his wife's family name), Pelican Island (renamed Jerseyville, after the Earl of Jersey), and Summer Island. But Kinchela is not mentioned.

The listed villages came into being after Port Macquarie was established in 1821 as a penal settlement, and flourished with the influx of cedar-getters and sawyers after 1835. It has long been believed¹ that one of those involved in the trade was a man named Kinchela. Although Sydney's *Australasian Chronicle* (28 April 1841) reported that three cedar merchants were active on the Macleay at the time—William Scott, William Wright and Thomas Small—the name of Kinchela was not included.

Surveyors (such as Clement Hodgkinson in 1840, and Herborn in 1860) described the Lower Macleay as thick impenetrable brush, but it is quite possible that a cedar-getter by the name of Kinchela made his way from the Manning or Hastings Rivers, forging a walking track to this area. If so, it would have been the natural thing to set up a slab hut near the water and to then use the creek and the river to float the cedar logs downstream to agents before they were shipped to Sydney. Both the creek now known as the Kinchela and the Macleay River would have been ideal for this purpose and a good

reason for settling in that location.

As it happens, the surname Kinchela is not unknown in the area. A census return for the locality Taylors Arm, dated 5 April 1891, records the presence of a Peter Kinchela. Granted this is not direct evidence of an earlier cedar cutter of that name, but it lends some credibility to the possibility.

Geoff Minett
Research Officer

Mary Boulton Pioneer Cottage and Museum

References

- Australasian Chronicle*. Sydney, NSW. 1839-1843.
Carey, Caroline. *Tales of Trial Bay: an Early History of South West Rocks*. South West Rocks, NSW: C. Carey, 1993
Hodgkinson, Clement. *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*. London: T&W Boone, 1845
Kinchela Public School Centenary, 1881-1981. Kinchela, NSW: Kinchela Public School Centenary Committee, 1981
Townsend, Norma. *Valley of the Crooked River: European Settlement on the Nambucca*. Kensington, NSW: NSWU Press, 1993

Endnote

- ¹ 'It is reported that the name Kinchela derived from a Mr Kinchela, a cedar getter, who made his camp on the northern bank of Kinchela Creek where it now joins the Macleay River, somewhere near the site of the old Kinchela Hall.' *Kinchela Public School Centenary 1881-1981*.

Mutchilba, Qld

Mutchilba is a settlement near Cairns in northern Queensland. Its name was first used in 1923 for the railway station established there; unsubstantiated records say that the name came from an unknown Aboriginal word meaning 'big dead tree'.

Queensland's Department of Natural Resources & Mines records the name as 'approved & current'—and has done for some time. The ANPS Database has contained an identical entry for Mutchilba for some years. And yet—in October the ABC breathlessly reported that the town 'on Friday got back its identity and will now be added to the place name database.' The story said that the town, once famous for its Mango Mardi Gras, has not technically existed on the map for more than a decade. We shall attempt to solve this enigma by contacting our good friends in Brisbane — the result in our next issue, we hope!

Norseman

Norseman, a town in the eastern goldfields of Western Australia, has always been toponymically well-known for being one of the few places named after a horse. Joyce Miles made brief mention of it in our March 2009 issue—now Geoff Minett takes up the story.

The history of Norseman and Dundas dates to 1840 with the exploration of the south coast of Western Australia by Edward John Eyre, and the establishment in 1864 of a sheep station in Esperance by the Dempster brothers from Northam. In 1871 John Forrest (later to become WA's first Premier) crossed from Western Australia into South Australia, finding good pasture lands which led to the pioneering of Mundrabill, Balladonia and Frazer Range sheep stations. And between 1876 and 1878 the construction of the Overland Telegraph (coastal) from Albany to Adelaide was completed, and Western Australia was linked to the rest of the world.



In 1894, Lawrence Sinclair, his brother George Sinclair and John Allsop were prospecting 4 miles north of Dundas, along with three others (named Ramsay, Talbot and Goodliffe), when they discovered a rich gold reef.

The reef claim was registered on 13th August, 1894 by the Sinclairs and Allsop. (Ramsay, Talbot and Goodliffe registered a claim a few miles east of this.)

Laurie Sinclair's family had emigrated from the Shetland Islands in January 1864, and he was proud to call himself a Norseman; he had even named his horse Norse-Man.

The story, as commonly told, recounts how Laurie Sinclair's horse uncovered with its hooves a very rich specimen of gold-bearing ore. When the claim was registered, it was named *Norseman's Find* in honour of the horse.

Prior to Laurie Sinclair's success he had been employed by the Dempster brothers when they pioneered Esperance.

Laurie was returning after an unsuccessful expedition to the Coolgardie goldfields in 1893 when he found that his brother George and Jack Allsop were prospecting at Dundas, and he decided to join them.

Following the discovery of the Norseman reef, Dundas thrived and Norseman struggled at first, but by January 1895 it had more than 200 miners working the fields. A townsite was requested by the locals, lots were surveyed in April of that year, and the townsite was gazetted in May. Although there were various suggestions made for the name of the new town, existing common usage of *Norseman* was sufficient to persuade the Minister for Lands to select that name.

The Post Office was opened later in 1895, followed by two banks. The first doctor arrived in September 1895, with a tent being used as the hospital. The first newspaper for the area was printed also in 1895, followed in January 1896 by the first issue of the *Norseman Pioneer*. In 1898 three churches appeared: Church of England, Roman Catholic and Wesleyan.

Norseman today has a rather transitory population of approximately 1800, with Central Norseman Gold Corporation being the major mining company and employer.

All roads are sealed and the town has a substantial shopping area with one bank, four churches, Junior High School, two hotels, three garages and supporting sporting facilities.

Geoff Minett

Research Officer

Mary Boulton Pioneer Cottage and Museum



The Placenames Australia Award 2013

The *PA Award* in 2013 will take the form of a

\$1000 grant

to support placename research by a History Society or other community organisation.

Placenames Australia will award \$1000 to the group submitting the best proposal for original research into the placenames of their area of interest. Applications should state the nature and location of the project and outline the method for completing data collection and processing. It is intended that projects should be completed and written up within 12 months of the granting of the award.

Applicants should note that placenames which have not been previously recorded or officially recognised are of particular interest. Projects which focus on street and road names, however, are not eligible for this Award.

Are you a member of such a group? Encourage your society or association to apply—the closing date for submissions is 1 July 2013. Grant proposals should be sent to the President of Placenames Australia, and authorised by the Secretary or other delegated officer of your association.

For more information and advice on the form of the project, contact the President, Dr Dale Lehner, dalelehner@bigpond.com or download our **information sheet and application pro-forma** from www.anps.org.au/documents/PA Award 2013.docx



The Murray Chapman Award for Research into Aboriginal Placenames

The Geographical Names Board of NSW is sponsoring a

\$5000 award

in 2013 for research into Aboriginal placenames.

The Award honours the memory of Murray Chapman, a Yuwalaray man who was a member of the Board and a champion of Aboriginal languages. Researchers are invited to submit papers, not previously published or accepted for publication. The Board is seeking contributions which add to the knowledge base of Aboriginal placenames in NSW.

Work from new and previously-unpublished researchers is welcome, and the Board encourages collaborative and mentoring arrangements as a way of enabling appropriate papers to be completed.

Enquiries may be made to:

The Acting Secretary
Geographical Names Board of NSW
PO Box 143
BATHURST NSW 2795
Email: GNB@lpma.nsw.gov.au

Papers should be submitted by **1 August 2013** to the same address

Warrell Creek update

In September last year, Geoff Minett updated us on his attempt (first revealed in our March 2009 issue) to trace the naming history of Warrell Creek. The creek joins the Nambucca River in northern NSW. Geoff's conclusion was that the name comes from a Gumbaynggir word *wirraal*, 'black duck', no doubt because the creek was a popular habitat for those native ducks. One question remains, however. As Geoff noted, the stream was mapped by Crown Surveyor Hodgkinson in 1841 as *Gurravembi Creek* and remained so for many years, until it was replaced in the 1890s by its new name of *Warrell Creek*. Where did that original name come from?

Steve Morelli of the Muurrbay Language Centre at Nambucca Heads has come to the rescue. Steve has evidence that the word belonged not to Gumbaynggir but to either or both of two related languages, Dhanggati and Ngambaa. In Dhanggati, *gura* = 'long-necked turtle

(stink turtle)', and *bimbi* = 'struck by lightning'. The stop consonant 'b' in Dhanggati corresponds to the fricative 'ß' in Ngambaa. Steve's conclusion therefore is that the original Ngambaa word was *guraßimbi* 'long-necked turtle struck by lightning'. English speakers would have naturally interpreted the fricative sound as 'v', hence Gurravembi.

Steve confirms that the wetland area north of Yarrhapinni is a natural habitat for ducks, and suggests that Gurravembi is probably best seen as one particular site within the larger Warrell 'black duck' area.

Steve Morelli can be contacted at:

Muurrbay Aboriginal Language & Culture Co-operative
14 Bellwood Road
Nambucca Heads NSW 2448
www.muurrbay.org.au

Khancoban update

In previous issues, Mark Oldrey and John Murphy have speculated on the origin of the name of Khancoban, a small town in the Snowy Mountains. John suggested in our issue of December 2012 that the *-coban* element might mean 'large, tall' or alternatively 'head'. He further wondered whether *khan-* might not have anything to do with India (as Mark and others had suggested) but might be cognate with the first syllable of *Canberra*, which is sometimes said to mean 'meeting place, camp ground'. **Professor Harold Koch** of the Australian National University has responded, and we are grateful for the benefit of his expertise in Aboriginal languages.

1 Coban does indeed mean 'big', but in Pidgin (English). It is derived from a Sydney language word. The form is actually more accurately *kabun*. The fact that Lhotsky (1839:161) included *kabon* 'large' in his Monaro wordlist does not prove it was a local word, since his wordlist includes a number of Pidgin words. As for Cobban Johnny—many Aboriginal people in the colonial era had European names, and many had the descriptive Cobban before their name to distinguish them from another person with the same name, who might then have *Narang* 'little' as a descriptor.

2 *Cobbera* does indeed mean 'head', but also in Pidgin—the word is from the Sydney language. This word has nothing to do with *Coban*.

3 The name *Khancoban* presumably does represent an Aboriginal word of the form *kankuban* (possibly *kankubayn*, given the variant with *-in*). The name is not necessarily compounded of two elements; it could simply be a native word with three syllables. The second part at any rate does not very well match the form *kabun* 'big'. Nor is the name likely to have included a Pidgin term.

4 The first element of the name *Khancoban* cannot be

equated with the *Can-* in the name *Canberra*, since the evidence points to this name beginning with *ngan-*, possibly *nganbirra*, and there is apparently no evidence that *Khancoban* began with *ng-*. There is furthermore no evidence that *nganbirra* is a compound with two meaningful elements, or that part or the whole of the name meant either 'camping ground' or 'meeting place'. This suggested meaning is simply a functional description, indicating that the place named Canberra was the site of an encampment of Aborigines, which is known from accounts of 19th century life in the area. (For discussion of the placename *Canberra* see Koch 2009).

References

- Koch, Harold. 2009. The methodology of reconstructing Indigenous placenames: Australian Capital Territory and southeastern New South Wales. In Koch, Harold and Luise Hercus (eds), *Aboriginal placenames: Naming and re-naming the Australian landscape*. (Aboriginal History Monograph 19) Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc and ANU E Press. 115-171 (chapter 5).
- Lhotsky, John, 'Some remarks on a short vocabulary of the natives of Van Diemen Land; and also of the Menero Downs in Australia', *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society, London*, 9 (1839), 157-162.

John Atchison OAM

We offer our congratulations to John Atchison, whose Medal in the General Division of the Order of Australia was announced on Australia Day this year. He was honoured for 'service to the community of New England as a historian and educator'.

Placenames Australia honours John as one of the founders of the Australian National Placenames Survey. In 1972, he was appointed the original Research Fellow for the initial phase of the Survey. Although for various reasons (largely financial) the project became inactive from 1975, John continued his interest in placenames and never stopped efforts to revive the work. Those efforts were rewarded when, in 1990, a meeting at ANU

set up an interim steering committee for the renewed project. John was asked to take study leave to work up a funding application. Although this application was not immediately successful John, with others, persevered; and in 1998 a grant from the Australian Academy of the Humanities saw the Survey revived and located at Macquarie University in Sydney.

John's early publications in toponymy, along with those of J.S. Ryan, provided a solid theoretical and practical basis for the work of the Australian National Placenames Survey. We who now labour as toponymists in Australia owe those two distinguished colleagues from the University of New England a great debt of gratitude.

Placenames Puzzle Number 45

Exotic animals I:

The clues reveal names of exotic animals that hide out in Australian toponyms. The 'what' clues identify the animal; the 'where' clues indicate where they hide out. e.g. What: We complain a lot about this species introduced into our streams and rivers; Where: At a bay in Tasmania ... Carp Bay.

- What:* Some are hot, some follow, and the rest harass.
Where: At a very unpleasantly named location on the Nundle Road south of the Nundle State Forest, south-east of Tamworth.
- What:* The PM pronounces her adversary's name like this.
Where: On a tiny island just off the east coast of Wilsons Promontory (Vic).
- What:* After swallowing one, the little old lady died of course.
Where: A departed one can be found in a Snowy Mountains opening.
- What:* Their masters had a reputation for cursing them
Where: At the northern tip of Inskip Peninsula, Tin Can Bay (Qld)
- What:* John McArthur first imported these.
Where: On the road between Portland and Casterton (Vic).
- What:* This ruminant one is one letter short of one who feels or expresses malevolent smugness or exultation.
Where: At a place near Sydney's CBD that was known by the Gadigal people as Melmel.
- What:* A beatnik name for a cool guy.
Where: At one of a trio of islands off the east coast of Flinders Island.
- What:* Stromboli was their master.
Where: At an isolated mesa in the Wolgan Valley (NSW), part of the Gardens of Stone National Park.
- What:* This one simply loves to mess about in boats.
Where: At a tiny island off the coast of Geraldton (WA).
- What:* A sweet and beloved animal, but expensive.
Where: At a location east of Dorrigo (NSW) just off the Waterfall Way.

© Jan Tent 2013

1. The Murder Dog
2. Rabbit Island
3. Dead Horse Gap
4. Bullock Point
5. Merino
6. Goat Island
7. Cat Island
8. Donkey Mountain
9. Rat Island
10. Deer Vale

Become a Supporting Member!

We realise that not everyone who wishes to support the Australian National Placenames Survey can do so by carrying out toponymic research and supplying information for our database. There IS another way — become a supporting member of Placenames Australia! In doing so, you'll help the Survey and its volunteer researchers by providing infrastructure support. In return, you'll have the assurance that you'll be helping ensure the continued existence of this prestige national project, and we'll guarantee to keep you in touch by posting you a printed copy of this quarterly newsletter.

The Survey has no funding of its own — it relies on the generosity of its supporters, both corporate and individual. We will try to maintain our current mailing list, as long as we can; in the long term, priority will be given to Supporting Members of the association, to our volunteer research friends, to public libraries, history societies and media organisations.

Please consider carefully this invitation. If you wish to become a Member, write a cheque to Placenames Australia Inc. or arrange a bank transfer, and post this page to the Treasurer at the address below.

To ensure your continued receipt of the Newsletter, even if you are unable to support ANPS by becoming a Member, please take the time to tick the appropriate box below and return this form to us.

Membership Details

Date:.....

Name:.....

Organisation (if applicable):.....

Address:.....
.....

Phone:..... Fax:..... Email:.....

- I wish to become a individual member of Placenames Australia\$25
- I wish to become a organisational/corporate member of Placenames Australia\$250
- I am unable to become a member at this time, but I would like to receive newsletters
 by post OR by email
- Please remove me from the newsletter mailing list
- Please note my change of address (new address above)

Payment Details

- Cheques made out to Placenames Australia Inc ABN 39 652 752 594
- Direct transfer to Westpac Banking Corporation BSB 032-089, Account 275989

Please forward this form and payment to:

Placenames Australia
PO Box 5160
SOUTH TURRAMURRA NSW 2074

We say thank you to...

our corporate sponsor, the Geographical Names Board of NSW — and to the Acting Secretary of the Board, Kevin Richards. This year's newsletters could not have been published without the support of the GNB.

Contributions

Contributions for Placenames Australia are welcome. Please send all contributions to the Editor, David Blair, by email: <editor@anps.org.au> Supporting photographs or other illustrations are greatly appreciated.

Closing dates for submissions are:

March Issue: 31 January September Issue: 31 July
June Issue: 30 April December Issue: 31 October

