

ABORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

(By Dr. Martin Doyle, M.L.C.)

The Awabakal dialect was the first of the Australian languages reduced to writing and its construction and grammar studied. Philologists are under a debt of gratitude for this to the Rev. L. E. Threlkeld, a missionary sent out and for a time assisted in his work by the London Missionary Society.

Mr. Threlkeld had previously been in the South Sea Islands, and brought to his task an intellect trained in the subject of language formation; and so his work in the Awabakal dialect stands first in the estimation of philologists. It is much to be regretted that he died before he had finished his Awabakal lexicon. The Awabakals were a branch of the great coastal tribe named Kurringgai, whose hunting grounds extended from the Macleay River to the coast south of Sydney, and they were so named by reason of their hunting grounds being about the mouth of the Hunter River, and around the great lake which they named Awaaba.

Some time about 1816 or 1817 Governor Lachlan Macquarie visited these parts, and changed the name of the lake from Awaaba to Lake Macquarie. At that time and for many years after the island in Lake Macquarie was known as Boroyirong corrupted by the white invaders into "Bury-your-own," and as "Bury-your-own" it was known until quite recent times.

Pulba, or Bulba, is the Awabakal generic term for island. Any island was called pulba or bulba. It is immaterial whether "P" or "B" is used as the initial letter, for Threlkeld lays it down in his grammar that the blacks' pronunciation of "b" and "p" was not as sounded in English, but was a combined sound which was a mixture of both sounds.

In discarding the original name, I do not think the Bulba trustees acted wisely. The pronunciation given to Mr. Talbot by the last Awabakalin, Margaret, was no doubt correct, but it is possible Mr. Talbot did not quite get the pronunciation. I knew Margaret. She was born at Walong Creek and was educated in Sydney and no doubt she got the name correctly, but Mr. Threlkeld, who spoke the language fluently, writes it as ending in the nasal sound "ong," just as the final syllable in Walong is sounded. Mr. Talbot writes of Margaret as "Queen" Margaret. There were no kings and queens amongst the Australian aborigines until the advent of the English. The blacks owned everything in common, and were ruled by the elders of the tribe. It was the elder men of the tribe who held the traditions and the ritual of the various ceremonies, who enforced the laws, and passed on their knowledge to the young men.

It is a pity that in giving names to localities, railway stations, and streets in our Australian towns, that we do not make more use of names that are either historical to us or Australian.